ED420-795

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 420 795 CE 076 786

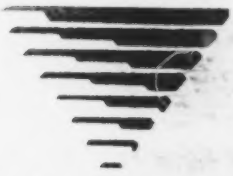
| | |
|---|---|
| AUTHOR | Dwyer, Peter; Harwood, Aramiha; Poynter, Geoff; Tyler, Debra |
| TITLE | Participant Pathways and Outcomes in Vocational Education and Training: 1992-1995. Report of Findings of an ANTA-Funded Project. Research Report 14. |
| INSTITUTION | Melbourne Univ., Parkville (Australia). Youth Research Centre. |
| SPONS AGENCY | Australian National Training Authority, Brisbane. |
| ISBN | ISBN-0-7325-1532-7 |
| PUB DATE | 1997-03-00 |
| NOTE | 59p. |
| AVAILABLE FROM | Youth Research Centre, Faculty of Education, University of Melbourne, Parkville 3052, Victoria, Australia ($10 Australian). |
| PUB TYPE | Reports - Research (143) |
| EDRS PRICE | EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS. |
| DESCRIPTORS | *Educational Attitudes; *Educational Quality; Educational Research; Foreign Countries; Graduate Surveys; Occupational Aspiration; Outcomes of Education; *Postsecondary Education; Student Attitudes; Teacher Attitudes; *Vocational Education |
| IDENTIFIERS | Australia (Victoria) |

ABSTRACT

A 1996 project examined student aspirations, experience, and outcomes to identify barriers to participation in and effective delivery of vocational education and training (VET). The sample of 4,000 students in Victoria, Australia, finished their schooling in 1991. Findings indicated the following: 37 of 81 interviewees were focused and cautious about taking risks; 35 had taken a less straight-forward path; 28 of the 35 planned full-time study but were more prepared to take a risk than the focused group. The majority of young women looked at their studies in terms of where they wanted to go; more males looked at VET as a means of helping them find their way. Positive aspects of VET were practicality, teachers' experience within their industry, and teacher help. Negative aspects were as follows: classrooms and facilities; lack of information; difficulties with cross-crediting; isolation; costs; and outdated courses. The overwhelming majority of participants showed a dramatic shift from negative preconceptions to highly positive reassessments of VET's value. Questionnaire findings indicated the following: that a majority of VET students gave a good rating to building conditions, teaching quality, and staff interest in students; most VET students agreed universities were overrated; and a majority saw VET as useful for future employment, relevant for personal development, and worth recommending. VET providers perceived a slow turnaround in awareness of and attitudes toward VET. The most serious barrier to participation was undervaluing of the VET pathway within public policy and attitudes and in school settings. (Contains 17 references) (YLB)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

*Research* ***Report 14***



AUSTRALIAN
NATIONAL TRAINING
AUTHORITY

# *PARTICIPANT PATHWAYS AND OUTCOMES IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING: 1992-1995*

Peter Dwyer, Aramiha Harwood,
Geoff Poynter and Debra Tyler

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
R. Holdsworth
2A TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Youth Research Centre
March 1997

# *PARTICIPANT PATHWAYS AND OUTCOMES*

## *IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING: 1992-1995*

*Report of Findings of an ANTA-Funded Project*

**Peter Dwyer, Aramiha Harwood, Geoff Poynter and Debra Tyler**

**Youth Research Centre**
**March 1997**

First published March 1997 by the:

Youth Research Centre
Faculty of Education
University of Melbourne
Parkville 3052

Phone: (03) 9344 8251
Fax: (03) 9344 8256

ISBN 0 7325 1532 7

## *Acknowledgments*

This Project was kindly funded by the Research Advisory Council of the Australian National Training Authority. We are grateful to Susan Day who overcame many obstacles in matching up the old 1991 and 1992 files, processing the 1996 data and negotiating the printing and distribution of the research questionnaires. Aramiha Harwood and Debra Tyler were very thorough in their follow-up of the interview sample and the productive and informative extracts they prepared from their records of those interviews. Particular thanks are due to Geoff Poynter who took over the responsibility for the second Phase of the Project involving meetings and consultations with VET Providers. In relation to the second phase, the assistance received in particular from people associated with the Box Hill, Holmesglen, Kangan, Northern and Outer Eastern Metropolitan Institutes of TAFE, the Faculty of Education at the University of Melbourne, Affirmative Action in Training Inc, and the Careers Education Association of Victoria is very much appreciated. A final debt of thanks is due to all the participants in the series of surveys distributed in the course of the Project and for the seriousness with which they treated the questions and their informative comments about their own pathways through education and training.

© Youth Research Centre

All rights reserved. No part of this report may be reproduced or utilised in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the Youth Research Centre.

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and are not necessarily those of the Youth Research Centre, the Faculty of Education, The University of Melbourne or the Australian National Training Authority.

# Table of Contents


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Acknowledgments | 2 |
| | Tables and Charts | 4 |
| | Executive Summary | 5 |
| 1. | **Post-school Pathways - The Research Context** | 7 |
| | The Impact of School Retention | 7 |
| | Post-school Training Pathways | 8 |
| 2. | **Post-school Pathways - The Participant Context** | 10 |
| | A Victorian Data Base | 11 |
| | The Research Base | 16 |
| 3. | **Post-school Pathways - Participant Perceptions (1)** | 17 |
| | The 1996 Interview Sample | 18 |
| | 1. Complexity of Patterns. | 19 |
| | 2. Assessment of VET Options. | 22 |
| | 3. Gender and Regional Differences. | 26 |
| | 4. Changed Perceptions. | 28 |
| | 5. Cohort-specific Issues. | 31 |
| 4. | **Post-school Pathways - Participant Perceptions (2)** | 34 |
| | The 1996 Large Questionnaire | 34 |
| | 1. The Sample. | 34 |
| | 2. Study Experience | 36 |
| | 3. Broader Concerns | 37 |
| | 4. Comparative Assessments of VET | 39 |
| | General Comment | 42 |
| 5. | **The VET Provider Response** | 43 |
| | Main Themes | 43 |
| | Specific Issues | 44 |
| | Conclusion | 50 |
| 6. | **Barriers to Participation** | 52 |
| | Students from Rural Areas | 52 |
| | Public Perceptions | 54 |
| | Final Comment | 54 |
| | References | 55 |

## *Tables*


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Table 1. | Educational Profiles of 19 Year Olds, 1990 Actuals | 8 |
| Table 2. | SCOPE Data Set | 11 |
| Table 3. | SCOPE - Intention to Leave - by Year Level | 11 |
| Table 4. | SCOPE - Broad Study and Work Intentions | 12 |
| Table 5. | SCOPE Apprenticeship or Traineeship Intentions | 12 |
| Table 6. | SCOPE v. Next Move Variations | 12 |
| Table 7. | Next Move initial post-school outcomes for 1992 | 13 |
| Table 8. | Next Move Study Intentions & Outcomes | 14 |
| Table 9. | Next Move - Time Spent on Study | 14 |
| Table 10. | Next Move - Stage Reached | 14 |
| Table 11. | Next Move - Type of Institution | 15 |
| Table 12. | Next Move - Type of Program | 15 |
| Table 13. | Next Move - Area of Study | 15 |
| Table 14. | Next Move - Apprenticeship Trade Area | 15 |
| Table 15. | Next Move - Study Options and Combinations | 15 |
| Table 16. | Non-Study Sample - Experience of Unemployment | 16 |
| Table 17. | Non-Study Sample - Renewed Study Options | 16 |
| Table 18. | Non-Study Sample - Study Involvement | 16 |
| Table 19. | Family Country of Origin | 34 |
| Table 20. | Parental Occupations | 35 |
| Table 21. | Parental Education | 35 |
| Table 22. | Locality (% Response) | 35 |
| Table 23. | Place of Residence (% Response) | 36 |
| Table 24. | Future Employment | 36 |
| Table 25. | Study Difficulties (% Response) | 36 |
| Table 26. | Enrolment | 37 |
| Table 27. | Student assessments of merits of courses of study | 37 |
| Table 28. | Assessment of job characteristics | 38 |
| Table 29. | Characteristics of adult life | 38 |
| Table 30. | Five years from now | 39 |
| Table 31. | Rating of VET Characteristics (% Responses) | 39 |
| Table 32. | Comparisons between VET and University Courses (%) | 40 |
| Table 33. | Differences between VET and University Respondents(%) | 40 |
| Table 34. | Opinions About VET Courses (% Responses) | 41 |
| Table 35. | Differences of Opinion About VET Courses (%) | 41 |
| Table 36. | Transition Factors for Rural Respondents | 52 |
| Table 37. | Rural Student Educational Options | 53 |


## *Charts*


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Chart 1 | Next Move study and work outcomes. | 13 |
| Chart 2. | Selecting The Research Sample on 1992-95 VET Pathways | 17 |
| Chart 3. | Summary Findings from Re-Surveys of Next Move Data Set | 18 |
| Chart 4. | Summary Findings on Patterns and Progress | 32 |
| Chart 5. | Summary Findings on Assessment of VET | 33 |
| Chart 6. | Summary of Survey Findings | 42 |
| Chart 7. | Providers: Main Response Themes | 44 |
| Chart 8. | Providers: Main Issues and Concerns | 51 |

# *Executive Summary*

1. The aim of this Project was 'to examine student aspirations, experience and outcomes in order to identify barriers to participation in and effective delivery of programs in Vocational Education and Training'. The findings of the Project are derived from a sub-sample of Victorian students who finished their schooling in 1991. The sample was drawn from a group of about 3,000 exit-students who had gone on to further study immediately on leaving school and a further 1,000 who had not chosen to study in 1992 but amongst whom 8 out of 10 later resumed study of some kind. A final sample of about 2,000 drawn from each of the 1992 'Studying' and 'Non-Study' sub-sets participated in a detailed questionnaire on their subsequent progress, and a selected group of 81 of these provided extended interviews on issues covered in the questionnaire.

2. Of the questionnaire participants, there were 460 (27 per cent) who had been involved in Vocational Education and Training settings, a further 296 (18 per cent) who had experience in both VET and university, and a final 916 (54 per cent) who had only been to university.

3. While the interviewees confirmed findings from other studies on the negative status of VET pathways within their own school settings, they and the survey respondents as a whole presented a dramatically different assessment of VET as a result of their more recent experience. The respondents, including those whose further education was restricted to university settings, were overwhelmingly positive about both the value and usefulness of the VET pathway. The vast majority of all respondents agreed with the suggestion that VET was 'useful for future employment' (91 per cent) and disagreed with the opinion that TAFE was 'a waste of time' (84 per cent). In particular, those with some direct personal experience of VET study were much more positive (over seventy per cent in agreement) than their university counterparts about how well-organised and well taught their courses were. Over fifty per cent of those with some form of VET exposure agreed that their experience had been 'generally better than I'd expected' while 85 per cent of those with both VET and university backgrounds and 86 per cent with only VET experience considered that it was 'worth recommending to others'.

4. The response of VET providers to this data was informative. They provided an informed assessment of both the strengths and weaknesses of current VET operations and their capacity to meet the needs of the student participants. They reinforced most of the evidence uncovered in the participant interviews and also the large questionnaire. They are confident from their more recent experience and monitoring that many of the circumstances resulting in bias against TAFE and ignorance of the TAFE experience have changed so that barriers to consideration of VET have been lowered. A "slow turnaround" in awareness of and attitudes toward VET is perceived.

# 1. Post-school Pathways - The Research Context

The heightened importance of vocational education and training was evident in the reports of the Finn, Carmichael, and Mayer committees set up to review post-compulsory education and training. Put simply the aim was to convert Australia into a nation in which the whole of the coming generation undertook post-compulsory education and thus emerged with a set of key work-related competencies to provide a skilled and flexible workforce for the future. Many of the recommendations of those reports have been carried through to the implementation stage, and professionals, particularly within the VET sector, have devoted considerable effort to the articulation of practical programs at a local or institutional level.

Thus, since the mid-eighties there has been a substantial redefinition of the agenda for youth and education policy, and it is expected that as many as 95 per cent of 19 year olds will participate in post-compulsory education and training by the year 2001. A range of initiatives was established in 1991-92 at the federal level to implement a Youth Social Justice Strategy, and the subsequent *Working Nation* White Paper (Commonwealth of Australia, 1994) of the previous government developed a series of new labour market and training initiatives including the Youth Training Initiative. However, while the new policy objectives were broadly accepted, there remains a question of whether the existing programs and new initiatives will actually achieve the stated goals for the year 2001. A major purpose of this Youth Research Centre Project has been to identify the degree to which young Australians experience and achieve success in their vocational education and training (VET) pathways and thus both develop their own potential and fulfil the objectives of national policy.

## The Impact of School Retention

Historically within Australia there has always been a substantial proportion of school students who have left school on passing the compulsory schooling age. Many of these have taken up apprenticeships and others have gone directly from school into paid employment but later returned to study. For both these groups the VET 'pathway' has been the most significant post-compulsory education option. Of those currently in their twenties, for example, TAFE has been an option of about a quarter of a million of Year 9 early school leavers and of a further million from Year 10.

The post-compulsory options of these leavers were considerably enhanced by the significant growth of the TAFE system in the period from 1973 to 1986. These years saw a 240 per cent increase in TAFE enrolments, with the numbers rising from 349,300 to 971,400. Included in this increase was an expansion of the options for women within TAFE. Thus between 1973 and 1986 female enrolments increased markedly from 24.5 per cent to 46.9 per cent (Leo, 1989 p.93). After that, the introduction of the Commonwealth Government traineeship scheme saw a further increase in female participation in the TAFE area.

Since the mid-eighties the proportion of early school leavers has decreased as a result of significant increases in school retention rates. This change in school retention has also been reflected in changes of policy with regard to post-secondary education intakes and programs. More students have been seeking entry into the post-secondary

field and the competition for the available places has become more intense, with the result that students with Year 12 certificates began to consider the VET option (Mageean, 1991). At the same time, the increased emphasis on the post-secondary field has also had some negative implications for VET.

One of the major results of improved retention rates was an accentuation in students' minds of an assumed direct link between completion of Year 12 and *university* entry. 'One of the undesirable consequences of increased retention to Year 12 has been a degree of "linear thinking" that concentrates almost exclusively on the university pathway as the only conceivable outcome to successful completion of Year 12' (Dwyer, 1993, p.26). The down side of this is that even into the 1990s the VET option was seen as less desirable. A 1987 study of student choice for example had earlier indicated that less than 10 per cent of Victorian Year 12 students were considering that option and also revealed 'that apprenticeships are becoming less attractive to school leavers' (Mageean, 1991, p.20). Sweet provided figures from the ANOP survey which indicated that 'between 1984 and 1990 the interest of 15- to 24-year olds in TAFE has fallen from 22 per cent to 12 per cent, while interest in university has risen from 19 per cent to 31 per cent' (Sweet, 1992, p. 37). Subsequently, the 1992 study of NSW Year 10 - 12 students' attitudes to post-compulsory education and training found that four times as many aspired to university (64 per cent) as TAFE (15 percent) and that over half (56 per cent) aspired to professional occupations (DEET, 1993, p. 6).

## Post-school Training Pathways

It is informative to contrast the actual participation levels in education and training for 19 year-olds in 1990, and the target scenario for the Year 2001 advocated in the Finn Report (Finn, 1991, p. 171). Table 1 shows that there is a substantial gap between the TAFE enrolments target (30.5 per cent) and the 1990 actuals (only 14.9 per cent), as well as between the 'not even completed Year 12' figures of a mere 5 per cent in the scenario as against the 1990 actual of 27 per cent.

**Table 1. Educational Profiles of 19 Year Olds, 1990 Actuals and Finn Year 2001 Targets**

| | Finn Scenario for Year 2001 (%) | 1990 Actual Profiles (%) |
|---|---|---|
| still at school | 5.6 | 2.5 |
| at TAFE | 30.5 | 14.9 |
| in Higher Education | 27.2 | 23.0 |
| doing other study | 6.8 | 2.3 |
| already qualified | 15.9 | 12.2 |
| completed year 12 only | 10.0 | 18.0 |
| not even completed year 12 | 5.0 | 27.1 |

Source: Finn Report (1991), p. 171.

The gap between TAFE 1990 actuals and the 2001 target raises concerns about the extent to which the implementation of post-compulsory policy has been affected by the expansion of the higher education sector during the 1980s.

We have already drawn attention to the fact that current student aspirations are considerably influenced by the over-identification of Year 12 outcomes with a single post-school option - that of the university. The reason for being concerned about this is that the university can only be the main post-school destination of a *minority* of the age-group. Even for those who gain a Year 12 qualification at least 50 per cent will in fact not gain a university place, and at most about 30 per cent of all Year 10 students

are ever likely to gain entry to the university, yet twice as many as that nevertheless regard it as their preferred option (DEET, 1993, p. 6). Thus, although TAFE remains as the other main educational option, unfortunately in the minds of likely participants it appears to be an unwelcome one. This is particularly true for students at the more senior levels of secondary schools. The DEET study of New South Wales Year 10 - 12 students, for example, indicated that only 15 per cent actually planned to go to TAFE and, of those who did not, 51 per cent had considered it 'but decided against it'. Furthermore, 'the perception that university is better than TAFE increases as a reason for not considering TAFE as students progress through secondary school' (DEET, 1993, p. 44). A more recent 1994 DEET report suggested a slight improvement of interest from the 15 per cent to the 20 per cent level (DEET, 1994).

These findings are confirmed by a number of recent projects completed by the Youth Research Centre. A major project on the implementation of post-compulsory policy in schools in three States uncovered a 'lack of interest in or knowledge about' the VET option amongst the current students, 'as well as some obvious uncertainty on the part of staff about new policies' in that area (Dwyer, 1995). Our three-year longitudinal study of early school leavers identified considerable resistance to and dissatisfaction with VET options (Holden, 1992), and their low levels of participation and success were confirmed both in our major review (Lamb, 1994) of the early school leaver cohorts in the Australian Longitudinal Survey (ALS) and the Australian Youth Survey (AYS), and in more specific studies of the education and training outcomes for young women (Wyn and Holden, 1994).

This current Research Project took this context into account. It drew on a substantial data base of over 29,000 Victorian school students who were planning to leave by the end of the 1991 school year, and has resurveyed them to plot their subsequent pathways through to 1996. The focus of the Project has been directed at those who either opted for or entered into vocational education and training pathways after leaving school, but it has also involved those following other pathways to provide comparative data on student experiences and outcomes. In general, a decidedly positive picture of the VET pathways has emerged.

# 2. Post-School Pathways - The Participant Context

In current policy provisions there is a significant gap between enrolment levels in VET pathways and projected outcomes for the year 2001. This can be partly explained by the priority given by the Federal Government during the Dawkins years to the restructuring of higher education. As Henry has argued TAFE would have been a more logical starting point for achieving the high participation targets the government sought and thus it remains 'curious' that the 'TAFE sector, rather than higher education, was not in fact chosen as the initial policy target in educational restructuring' (Henry, 1992, p. 408).

While this policy concentration gave preference to the university sector, it does not adequately explain the low status given to VET pathways by many secondary students. The gap between their aspirations and perceptions regarding TAFE and the policy targets proposed in the Finn Report is far too wide to be explained in purely structural terms. Some understanding and explanation of the VET pathways from the perspective of its actual or potential participants is also required. This Youth Research Centre Project has aimed to do this.

To evaluate the effectiveness of policy objectives and to determine whether those objectives are being met for those who do participate, some assessment of the coherence and consistency between the program objectives and their outcomes is required. This will depend mainly on four factors:

- successful provision for access to and availability of appropriate programs of training;
- the design and mode of delivery of those programs;
- the quality and effectiveness of particular programs in terms of their outcomes; and
- the removal of those gaps in or between existing programs which affect both access and delivery for particular target groups.

Relevant evidence on these four factors can be derived mainly from three sources:

- those offering and operating programs;
- those within industry co-operating in such programs or employing their graduates; and
- the participants themselves.

This Youth Research Centre project has concentrated particularly on the third of these sources in the belief that effectiveness of programs is directly related to the extent to which they are accessed by and prove successful to young people themselves. While each of the sources has a bearing on the apparent success or otherwise of education and training programs in terms of the degree of match between their stated objectives and outcomes, the actual match or mismatch between perceived needs and national objectives, outlined in the programs of delivery, and the perceptions and responses *of the intended clients* is in our view fundamental. Testing factors of coherence and consistency at this level through a consultative process is critical, or otherwise the failure at a policy level to respond to the aspirations of young people and provide effective training outcomes for them will remain unresolved. Priority should be given to an evaluation orientation which has a clear and explicit focus on *participant access to and outcomes from* programs.

# A Victorian Data Base

The Youth Research Centre holds, by arrangement with the Victorian Department of Business and Employment, exclusive access to a data set collected by the Department in 1990-1 and 1991-2.

In the first of each of these years, in what was called the SCOPE Project, the Youth Assistance Survey collected data regarding Victorian students intending to leave school in the following year. Included in the data was information about intentions of students for employment, training or further education. A follow-up survey, The Next Move Resurvey Project, was sent to these young people twelve months later, with a questionnaire asking if they were working, looking for work or studying.

Subsequently, of the total data set, 10,985 'Next Move' completed 1992 returns have been successfully cross-linked to the original 1991 SCOPE set of 29,155. This sample therefore is not seen as necessarily 'representative' of the original SCOPE survey population, although subsequent analysis indicates that the sample closely parallels the original. It does certainly provide an initial data base for examining the post-school experiences of particular young people in a variety of pathways, enabling also a comparison with their original intentions before leaving school.

### *The SCOPE Population*

As indicated, the original 1991 file includes 29,155 students intending to leave school at the end of the year. Tables 2 and 3 give the overall composition of the file along gender and Year lines, Table 4 provides a broad breakdown of student intentions in terms of either work or study, while Table 5 indicates the proportion aiming at either apprenticeships or traineeships. These Tables provide an overview of constituent groupings in our research sample.

First, in the whole SCOPE file, and as might be expected from their share in school participation rates, there is a greater proportion of females than males. Of the total of about twenty-nine thousand students there are over one thousand more young women than young men as indicated in Table 2.

**Table 2. SCOPE Data Set**

| | Number | Per cent |
|---|---|---|
| Female | 15,107 | 52 |
| Male | 13,778 | 47 |
| Unspecified | 260 | 1 |
| **Total** | **29,155** | **100** |

Second, in line with the higher female school participation rates, it is evident that more males than females are likely to leave before they have reached the Year 12 level. This is in fact the case for the SCOPE data set, as Table 3 indicates.

**Table 3. SCOPE - Intention to Leave - by Year Level**

| | Females (%) | Males (%) | Total (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Year 10 | 9.0 | 14.5 | 11.6 |
| Year 11 | 9.5 | 15.7 | 12.5 |
| Year 12 | 81.5 | 69.8 | 75.9 |

Third, in Table 4 we see another difference along gender lines - over one third of males were intending to look for employment rather than go on directly into study, whereas the proportion of females intending further study was as high as 80 per cent.

**Table 4. SCOPE - Broad Study and Work Intentions**

| | Female (%) | Male (%) | Total (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Study | 80 | 65 | 73 |
| Work | 17 | 35 | 26 |

Fourth, this difference is also apparent when we examine student intentions regarding entering upon apprenticeships. Higher proportions of males rather than females were aiming at undertaking apprenticeships, which reflects the dominance of males within the apprenticeship system in Australia. The post-school intentions regarding apprenticeships and traineeships are displayed in Table 5.

**Table 5. SCOPE Apprenticeship or Traineeship Intentions**

| | Female (%) | Male (%) | Total (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Apprenticeship | 5 | 24 | 14 |
| Traineeship | 5 | 9 | 7 |

These constituent groupings in the SCOPE data set confirm that it provides a satisfactory starting point for gathering further information about the pathways followed by school leavers. The composition of the file and the pattern of expectations indicated by the participants is broadly compatible with what we know about actual retention rates and post-school participation in various forms of employment, education and training.

### *The Next Move File*

As indicated earlier, the SCOPE Project was followed up a year later in what was termed the Next Move survey. The 1992 data from that survey succeeded in providing information on about 37 per cent of the total 1991 SCOPE population. Fortunately, there was a remarkably close match between the composition of the Next Move and SCOPE respondents. The main divergence was that the proportion of females rose from 52 per cent in the SCOPE file to 56 per cent in Next Move. Table 6 indicates the comparative data. As can be seen, on all aspects regarding Year attained, the intended outcome in terms of study, training or work, and even the gender distribution of respondents, there is a very close match between the SCOPE and the Next Move data.

**Table 6. SCOPE v. Next Move Variations**

| | SCOPE (%) | Next Move (%) |
|---|---|---|
| From Year 10 | 11.6 | 11.7 |
| From Year 11 | 12.5 | 11.5 |
| From Year 12 | 75.9 | 76.8 |
| Intended Studying | 73.0 | 74.8 |
| Apprenticeship | 14.0 | 14.0 |
| Traineeship | 7.0 | 7.0 |
| Intended Working | 26.0 | 24.5 |
| Females | 52.0 | 56.3 |
| Males | 47.0 | 43.7 |

In all there were 10,985 respondents in the 1992 Next Move data set. The general make-up of the data set, in terms of the actual 'first-year out' outcomes of the respondents, is given in Table 7. It indicates that the vast majority of these young people were continuing with their studies in some form or another (71 per cent of the females and 64 per cent of the males), with just over forty per cent in full-time or part-time employment and a further 13 per cent of males and females unemployed.

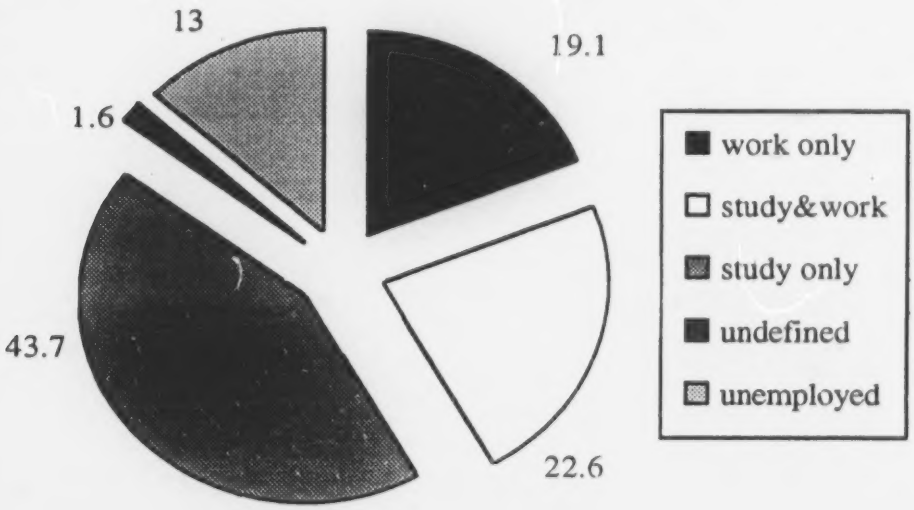
**Table 7. Next Move initial post-school outcomes for 1992**

| Outcome | Female (%) | Male (%) | Total (%) | Numbers |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Employed* | *43* | *41* | *42* | *4578* |
| full-time | 13 | 21 | 17 | 1810 |
| part-time | 30 | 20 | 25 | 2727 |
| unspecified | | | | 41 |
| *Unemployed* | *13* | *13* | *13* | *1424* |
| & seeking work | | | | 1196 |
| other | | | | 228 |
| *Studying* | *71* | *64* | *66* | *7285* |
| and working | | | | 2483 |
| not in work | | | | 4802 |
| Total | | | | 10,985 |

**(Percents exceed 100% because those studying/working are included in those 'in employment'.)**

Chart 1 provides in pictorial form a representation of the relative proportions in the various study and work outcomes.

**Chart 1. 'Next Move' Outcomes in first year after school - 1992 (%) (n= 10,985)**




The most marked difference between intentions and outcomes arises with regard to the sub-category of 'study'. There was some divergence for the group as a whole between overall study intentions before leaving school and the actual outcomes for the Next Move respondents, but as Table 8 indicates this was overwhelmingly due to outcomes for the females in the sample. Although 80 per cent of them had intended to continue their involvement in study of some kind, only 71 per cent of the Next Move respondents indicated that this was the actual outcome for them. By contrast there was an almost perfect match between study intentions and outcomes for the males in the sample.

**Table 8. Next Move Study Intentions & Outcomes**

| | Female (%) | Male (%) | Total (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Intended Study | 80 | 65 | 73 |
| Study as Outcome | 71 | 64 | 66 |

Of the total Next Move sample of 10,985, there were 7,285 who were involved in study either full-time or part-time in late 1992. The Youth Research Centre Project made particular use of this 7,285 'Studying' section of the data set, and extracted a sub-group made up of those who undertook their studies within the Vocational Education and Training (as distinct from Higher Education/University) pathways. Obviously, since 1992 there would have been considerable movement in the group as a whole, with some perhaps discontinuing their study, others changing courses or even institutions, and by the end of 1995 a proportion who would have already completed whatever studies they had undertaken. The main focus of the YRC Project was to document the 'pathways' of the VET sub-group to determine what 'participation in post-compulsory education and training' meant to them at a personal level and what (and how effective) the 'outcomes' of that participation have been. Although the total Next Move population had been last surveyed in late 1992, the 7,285 who had been studying in 1992 were re-surveyed by the Youth Research Centre in late 1995, and the Centre was successful in re-establishing contact with 2,967 (41 per cent) of these. Some general information about them is provided below.

### *The 1995 'Studying Sub-set' Respondents*

The re-survey in late 1995 was limited to some initial questions concerned the time spent in study, the type of program undertaken, what kind of institutions they were enrolled in, and (if they had undertaken an apprenticeship) what their trade area was. The following details concerning the 2,967 who responded in late 1995 to our initial re-survey are of interest.

1. They were first of all asked about their time spent on study since 1992. The majority (73 per cent) had studied full-time. A few (142) indicated that they had not studied after 1992.

**Table 9. Next Move - Time Spent on Study**

| full-time | part-time | both | neither |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2160 | 275 | 421 | 142 |

2. Fifty-three per cent of the respondents indicated that they had already completed their studies. A further 40 per cent were still studying and seven per cent had discontinued.

**Table 10. Next Move - Stage Reached**

| completed | still studying | discontinued |
|---|---|---|
| 1557 | 1192 | 235 |

3. Given that most of the respondents were in *full-time* study, their distribution between university and TAFE or other study involvement was in line with overall full-time Victorian figures for the two areas. Thus, three-quarters of the respondents had studied at a university with most of the remainder (24 per cent) enrolled in TAFE.

**Table 11. Next Move - Type of Institution**

| university | TAFE | other |
|---|---|---|
| 2238 | 710 | 203 |

(It should be noted however that if we take into account the part-time enrolment figures for overall TAFE enrolments, in Victoria TAFE participants make up a majority (about 57 per cent) of post-school students. Allowing for this, it would follow that TAFE participants are obviously *under*-represented in the 1992 'Studying' sub-set because most of them in this later re-survey in 1995 were full-time students).

4. The survey also asked about the type of program the students were enrolled in. As might be expected from the high number of those studying at a university, the majority (72 per cent) were enrolled in degree courses.

**Table 12. Next Move - Type of Program**

| degree | diploma | apprenticeship | traineeship | other |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2145 | 569 | 145 | 77 | 296 |

5. The main area of study at the degree or diploma level undertaken by the respondents was in science or arts.

**Table 13. Next Move - Area of Study**

| science or arts | teaching | business | other |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1373 | 242 | 681 | 601 |

6. Those involved in apprenticeships were asked about their trade area, and metalwork and building were the most frequently mentioned.

**Table 14. Next Move - Apprenticeship Trade Area**

| hairdressing | metals | automotive | food | building | other |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10 | 32 | 16 | 16 | 37 | 71 |

In summary, therefore, the following details for the 1992 'Studying' sub-set stand out:

- the majority (73 per cent) had studied full-time;
- fifty-three per cent of the respondents had already completed their studies;
- three-quarters had studied at a university with most of the remainder (24 per cent) enrolled in TAFE;
- the majority (72 per cent) were enrolled in degree courses; and
- the main area of study was in science or arts, while metalwork and building were the most frequently mentioned apprenticeships.

Of the total re-survey returns, we achieved the following spread of study options and combinations.

**Table 15. Next Move - Study Options and Combinations**

| university only | TAFE only | other only | university and TAFE | university and other | TAFE and other | all of these |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1979 | 526 | 137 | 139 | 33 | 22 | 5 |

### *The 1996 Re-Survey of the 'Non-Study' 1992 Sample*

In early 1996, we undertook also to re-survey the 3,700 Next Move participants who had not been involved in study when they were surveyed in 1992. It was possible that since then some may have reconsidered their options and entered upon a study pathway at some time after 1992. This 1996 re-survey was successful in re-establishing contact with 1,114 of the 'Non-Study' sample.

About 56 per cent (619) were female and 44 per cent were male. In the period since leaving school the respondents had been in a variety of work situations: 523 (47 per cent) had experienced full-time employment, 167 (15 per cent) had at some time been in a part-time job, and only 54 (5 per cent) had found no employment at all. Nevertheless, of the total group 526 (47 per cent) -or almost half - had experienced some form of unemployment. Table 16 gives the degrees of exposure to unemployment.

**Table 16. Non-Study Sample - Experience of Unemployment**

| a few brief periods | many periods | long periods | none |
|---|---|---|---|
| 383 (34%) | 72 (6%) | 145 (13%) | 588 (53%) |

Although the respondents were drawn from the non-study sub-set of the 1992 files, our 1996 follow-up revealed that many of (888 or 80 per cent) had since returned to some form of study. Table 17 gives the data on renewed study options.

**Table 17. Non-Study Sample - Renewed Study Options**

| school only | TAFE only | other | combinations of these |
|---|---|---|---|
| 36 | 444 | 330 | 78 |

Of those who had returned to study, 231 (26 per cent) had discontinued, while 516 (58 per cent) indicated that they had already completed. At the time of our re-survey there were still 284 (about 32 per cent) of those resuming study who were continuing with studies of some kind. Table 18 displays this information.

**Table 18. Non-Study Sample - Study Involvement**

| discontinued | completed | still studying |
|---|---|---|
| 231 | 516 | 284 |

In summary, therefore, the "Non-Study' sample revealed that

- only 47 per cent had found full-time employment and 47 per cent had been unemployed at some stage since leaving school;
- as many as 80 per cent of the respondents had returned to study since 1992, and already 58 per cent of these had completed.

## The Research Base

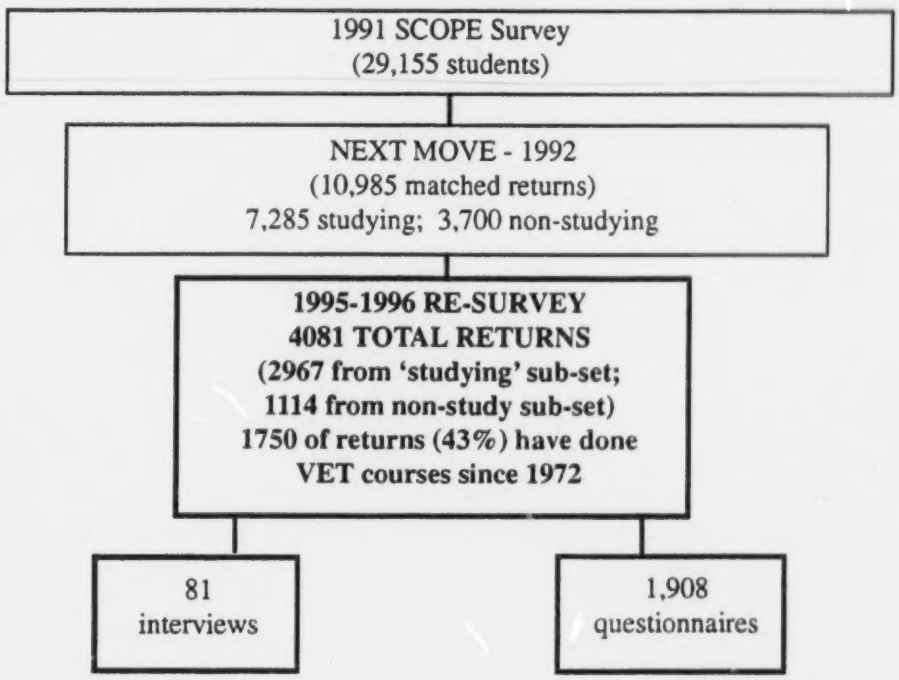
These two sub-samples of the 'Studying' and 'Non-Study' 1992 Next Move respondents have formed the basis of our 1996 investigation of VET pathways. We have identified a follow-up sample of over 4,000 young people in 1996 who reported back on their experiences in a variety of educational settings between 1992 and 1995. Of the total of over 4,000, there were 1,750 (43 %) who had been involved in Vocational Education and Training. In following up on their experience, we were also interested in comparing their assessments of their own progress at the post-secondary level with those of others in the total group whose experience had been limited to university settings. The following two chapters are devoted to the evidence that has emerged from questionnaires and interviews with these participants.

# 3. Post-school Pathways - Participant Perceptions (1)

Of the original 1992 Next Move data-base of 10,985, we had in 1995-6 renewed contact with 4,081. This led to the completion of a detailed follow-up questionnaire in mid-1996 by 1,908 participants, supplemented by person-to-person interviews with a sub-sample of 81. The findings from the interviews are presented in this chapter.

Looking back to the original SCOPE data base and the re-surveys in 1992 and 1995-6, we can represent the gradual narrowing down of a final research sample for the current VET Project in the following way (Chart 2).

**Chart 2. Selecting The Research Sample on 1992-95 VET Pathways**




Before proceeding in this chapter to give details concerning the findings from the interview sample, it is worth summarising here the information we already had gathered as a result of our initial 1995 and 1996 re-surveys. The major findings from the 1995 re-survey of the 'Studying' sub-set of the original Next Move data file and the subsequent 1996 re-survey of the 'Non-Study' sub-set are given in Chart 3.

**Chart 3. Summary Findings from Re-Surveys of Next Move Data Set**

*The 'Studying' Sub-set*

- 7, 285 were surveyed and of these 2, 967 (or 41 per cent) responded
- the majority of respondents (73 per cent) had studied full-time
- fifty-three per cent of them had already completed their studies
- three-quarters had studied at a university with most of the remainder (24 per cent) enrolled in TAFE
- the majority (72 per cent) were enrolled in degree courses
- the main area of study was in science or arts, while metalwork and buildingwere the most frequently mentioned apprenticeships
- *in general, the data on the 'Studying' sub-set suggests that university studies were chosen as the preferred option by those leaving school in 1991-2.*

*The 'Non-Study' Sub-set*

- 3, 700 were surveyed and of these 1, 114 (or 30 per cent) responded
- almost all (95 per cent) had been employed at some time since leaving school
- however, only 47 per cent had found full-time employment , and 47 per cent had been unemployed at some stage since leaving school
- as many as 80 per cent of the respondents had returned to study since 1992, and already 58 per cent of these had completed
- almost 60 per cent of those studying had been enrolled in a TAFE course
- *in general, the data on the 'Non-Study' sub-set indicates considerable job-insecurity, with substantial recourse to renewed study, especially in TAFE.*

## The 1996 Interview Sample

The 81 interview participants were to some extent self-selecting in that they had agreed to talk at a more personal level about their study and life experiences over the four year period from 1992 to 1996. At the same time, other criteria were also taken into account: their vocational education and training participation; the possible differences in access to course pathways of metropolitan and rural students; and variations in the influences and choices affecting the pathways of males and females. Thus, the interview sample was not chosen or intended to be 'representative', but rather to provide feedback on specific elements of personal experience that might affect some of the key issues related to 'participation' which was the overall theme of the Project. As a result the sample of 81 participants consisted of 43 females and 38 males, of whom 25 were from non-metropolitan areas and 55 had satisfactorily completed or graduated. For purposes of analysis, the major findings from the interviews were grouped into the following five categories: complexity of patterns; assessment of VET options; gender and regional differences; changed perceptions; and cohort-specific issues.

## 1. *Complexity of Patterns*

Our previous research on young people's options indicates that the usual tendency of defining transitions beyond school in terms of certain predetermined *linear* pathways fails to do justice to the actual experience and choices of young people. There is little doubt that, even for those who appear to be 'on track' in terms of the conventional mainstream models and patterns, moving into adult life and undertaking courses of study involves multiple considerations. The 'crossover' from one type of educational institution (school) to another (TAFE or a university), or from the world of school to the world of work, is not as smooth or clearly-defined as the 'pathways' metaphor might suggest. Often on leaving school young people find themselves in what is best described as 'uncharted territory' which gives a touch of unreality to the description of pathways in the Finn Report as a 'movement through a coherent set of educational and employment experiences leading to some identified destination' (Finn, 1991, p. 94).

For this reason, in analysing the interview material we paid attention to the complexity of patterns of choice in the participants' responses - noting the variety of ways in which young people negotiate their transitions into adult life. Three overall patterns or versions stood out. There are young people who appear to be 'focused' in terms of having a set outcome in mind; there are some whose pathways are 'mixed' or involve a variety of choices; and then there are others who have had an 'altered' transition in the sense that their progress beyond school involves definite changes of course and intentions.

### *Focused Patterns*

Of the 81 interviewed, 37 could be described as focused, of whom 16 were male and 21 female. Of these, 23 had planned on full-time study, 1 on part-time study, 10 wanted to get an apprenticeship and only 3 were unable to be specific about what they were initially hoping to do. As the label 'focused' suggests this group was overwhelmingly successful in achieving at least their initial goals of studying full time or gaining an apprenticeship.

This group of interviewees appeared to be internally driven, and set high standards for themselves. Some of them indicated that 'family' was a significant influencing factor (14), while for others school and teachers (6) had some but not as great an influence.

<u>Intention Factors.</u> In terms of factors influencing the intentions of this group some dominant themes emerge. Most particularly, they see qualifications as the way of initially achieving a good job and then of furthering their career prospects: *"I wanted to do something worthwhile, study, which would lead to a job"; "With the introduction of contract work I knew I had to improve my qualifications and specialise".*

In general, job satisfaction rated very highly, none of them was doing something they disliked and it seemed unlikely that they would. There was a keen sense of the competitive job market and a desire to be seen above others in the pecking order. Importantly they were prepared to do the study to enable them to fulfil this position: *"I thought a degree would ensure a job"; "Study will open doors; create options"; "My employers look at my studying very positively, they even help pay the fees and will give me a salary increase when I'm finished".*

A third of this group had taken on study which was directly related to a subject they either did in school or to an interest developed by other family members, eg: carpentry, music, plumbing, dress making and design, dance and childcare.

These interviewees appeared cautious about 'taking risks', and although money was an issue for them, job satisfaction (and therefore life satisfaction) rated more highly.

*Aspirations.* Of the 37, thirteen were unsuccessful in achieving their first preference which was to go to University. Of these 13, four eventually used TAFE as a stepping stone to University. Interestingly, these students, after being initially very disappointed (*" I was devastated, I thought it would be the end of the world"*) went on to finish their courses and described their lot as satisfactory; so even though their intentions were not initially realised this did not permanently dampen their spirits nor their capacity to choose an alternative and successful direction.

Overall, an impressive 26 out of 37 could be said to be satisfied or even very satisfied with their lot : *"TAFE has got me where I am so I am not complaining"; "Best two years of my life"*. Only one was in the 'very dissatisfied' category: *"I wish I had gone to Uni and got into a course I was really interested in."*; and 10 gave 'not sure' or 'maybe' responses. This last group consisted of those who either wished they had worked harder, wished they had got into university, wished they did not have to make such important decisions at a young age and finally wished they knew more about the courses before it was too late and they had cut off other options: *"At the start I didn't know what I wanted to do - pretty much got into a course and stuck with it, you take what you can get and try and stay with it"; "I don't want to be doing what I do now for the rest of my life. I've been thinking about going back to Uni and doing architecture"*.

### *Mixed Patterns*

As the title suggests this group of people, 35 out of the 81 interviewed, had taken a less straight-forward path to tertiary education or to employment. Of the 35, 17 were male and 18 female. 28 of the 35 planned on full-time study, only 2 on apprenticeships and 3 had no idea of a future direction.

*Intention Factors.* This group's intention factors were not as clearly expressed as those of the focused group. As the label suggests these students took a more complex or mixed pathway to study and employment. However there were still some common themes emerging. First, what became obvious was a general willingness on the part of the interviewees to change directions if for some reason their decisions needed to be reviewed. They were more prepared to take a risk than the focused group: *"I wasn't really interested in it, it's different to what I thought it would be"; "I decided to try out marketing but I found it really bad"; "I didn't get my first choice so I did engineering: it bored the piss out of me"*. Unlike the focused group this willingness to change direction or continue with something quite different after trying something out has meant they still reach a point of satisfaction in the end but their pathway has not been a linear one: *"It took me a while to find the right job but I finally got what I wanted"*.

A second common theme was the understanding that education will lead to greater opportunities for employment: *"I am hoping to get into the public service or whatever a BA can get me"; "I had 3 jobs and was studying at the same time - I didn't want to stop studying as I needed the qualifications to show to potential employers"; "I like doing short courses, they're a piece of paper the bosses like"*.

Family was given in 14 cases as the most significant influence in determining where they should go and how they should get there. School (and the interests developed during those years) also played an important role in influencing future directions, for example sport, writing, media studies and primary teaching: *"I loved sport at school"; "I had the best primary teacher and I wanted to be just like her"; "There was pressure from the school to go to uni"; "My parents always placed high regard on further education"*.

*Aspirations.* Fifteen of the 35 did not get their first preference but said that they were happy with their lot. Only 3 said they were dissatisfied. Of those who did get their first preference (12 in total) 8 said they were happy and 4 said they were not. Seemingly,

in their view, getting (or in this case not getting) your first preference does not destine you for future despair and dissatisfaction: *"Glad I didn't end up teaching, since there are so many different places you can end up in"; "I hated going to RMIT but I'm glad I went through it, as it pushed me into this particular course".*

There was an interesting mix of pathways taken by this group. It would appear that every possible combination was covered: TAFE (8) University (2) TAFE and part-time work (9), TAFE to University (8), TAFE to University and back to TAFE (1), University to TAFE and back to University (1) and apprentices (4). Of these, 10 have completed courses begun, 11 are still completing, 6 have given up the first course and moved on to a second, and 4 have given up the course and got a job.

Overwhelmingly, the majority, 24 of the 35, said that they were happy with where they had reached; 4 said that they were dissatisfied overall and 7 were in the 'maybe' category. If looked at in isolation, these figures could create a mistaken assumption that all is going extremely well, but the actual comments made within the interviews told another story. Although ostensibly happy many of the students added comments that told us that there is a certain yearning on their part for them to have 'done better'. *"Would have tried harder"* in either VCE, or looking for the right course, or pursuing their dreams is a frequent response. *"Wished I had gone straight into uni"*, was another common response. There is a sense that there is a right pathway and that they have taken too long in finding theirs: *"Many of my friends have already finished their degrees"; "Wish I had gone straight into marketing when I left school, would have been where I am now 5 years ago".*

Some of the respondents revealed a victim mentality in that they really do blame themselves for not doing 'it' the right way the first time.

### *Altered Patterns*

Only 9 of the 81 fell into this category. As the title suggests these were people who had made changes along the way in relation to their first intentions. Of the 9, six intended going to University and studying full time. Only 3 ended up doing this, and all 3 dropped out of the initial course, citing reasons such as: *"I hated it"; "I realised it wasn't for me"; "I struggled to like it but it didn't work".* Two started TAFE courses, and one dropped out because "it *bored me"*, while the other was only biding time at TAFE and dropped out when a job came up. Only one person was unsuccessful in terms of getting into any courses. She took on work temporarily, ended up staying on, and now she is, *"proud I am in my first job and done so well"*, as she is now a manager. Two of the 9 claim they were not given correct information about courses, were too late to apply and had not given adequate thought to the options available. They suggest there could be more information on getting into University with credit given from TAFE subjects already completed.

Six of the 9 changed courses at some point. Apart from not being suited to the course, other reasons and pressures described were: the worry about money, and so doing a course which was going to lead to employment; pressure from parents to do something and then not drop out; pressure from peers to get on and do something (ie keep up); and pressure from employers - this was a perceived pressure by one who felt that he would never get a job if it was known by his prospective employers that he chopped and changed courses (ie he would be seen as unstable). Two have changed courses twice, 2 have completed courses, 3 are still completing and 2 have taken up work positions.

<u>Intention Factors.</u> School and family were both given as significant influences in determining pathways: *"My family pushed me along, they didn't want me sitting around"; "My mother suggested I do a secretarial course"; "School was very pro uni"; "School had high expectations of us".*

Even though those in this group were characterised by the changes that they made in terms of courses and employment, there still existed a strong determination among them to do well; either to get the course they would like to do or the job that they would enjoy. The theme of 'education = employment = life satisfaction' was still strong amongst this group: *"Decided to go back to study to increase prospects of getting half way decent work"; "Decided to go back to school, I'm getting bored with the work routine after 4 years, if I can get better qualifications I can advance - open up my options".*

Aspirations. None of the 9 achieved their first preferences and on reflection only 3 said, with any conviction, that they were satisfied with their lot. Five were in the "maybe" category and only one was definitely not happy. These figures are clearly in contrast to the responses in the *focused* and *mixed* patterns where in general those who did not get their first preferences were able to move on and find another course or pathway which they did describe as satisfactory.

## 2. *Assessment of VET Options*

Positive Aspects. From the 81 interviewed, 72 had something positive to say about at least one of the courses they had done (or are still doing). Of most importance to people was the practicality of a course - the relevance it will have in the workplace. Twenty-seven respondents, in relation to the practicality of a VET course, noted teachers - *"the theory behind practices are explained to us"* - and courses - *"the course is always kept updated, what workplaces want"* - as integral parts of an overall positive experience in study. Particular VET courses were cited by 15 people as a major factor in their going on into full-time employment. Study at a TAFE or training college was seen as preparation for the workforce which made it easier in terms of actual study: *"You can do better at your work because you know what you're working for/towards, a job"*. Indeed, some of the TAFE courses pursued work for their students: *"The school actively sent students out on job interviews"*. Related to this was the work experience/placement component of certain courses - which 14 people saw as an excellent means not only of opening areas for future work (*"Part of work experience was at a Child Care centre, when I finished I was able to get a job there"*), but also of creating networks for the student in the workforce (*"Helps to establish contacts with people in the industry...the contacts are more important then the piece of paper"*), and of helping to actually learn what they might be letting themselves in for in a prospective work area (*"Helps to make sure it is what you want to do further on"*).

Of equal importance was the quality of the teaching and teachers in the class - 27 interviewees noting this as a positive aspect of their VET study. The quality of the teachers was usually related to their experience within the particular industry they were teaching in - *"So they know what they're on about"* being the usual comment. It was seen as good that the teachers had the time to help out students: *"Not so much that they spoon-fed you as they were there with the time to explain to you as they are there for the whole week"*. Eight subjects identified the personalised nature of the teaching as especially positive - some of them liking the smaller classes because *"You got to know lots of the people in the course"* and it was *"Good to bounce ideas off each other, good preparation for the workplace"*.

In relation to the course, 17 people looked at their study in abstract terms - they saw their study as development or growth in their knowledge, skills and confidence: *"It really tested my skills and helped develop my confidence"; "It was keeping my brain active"*. Ten respondents liked the wide range of subjects available within the course, and another ten people enjoyed the independence they had in VET: *"Having a lot of options was great"*. Three people cited the fact that at least they were doing something - working towards a qualification rather than sitting around doing nothing.

Some of the interviewees looked at the practical aspects of their VET studies. Four people saw the qualifications as important in terms of the actual industry recognition - it was a *"Means to an end. I'm fully licensed now (Real Estate Agent)"*. Two noted the length of the advanced certificates and associate diplomas as important for getting through quickly and into the workforce: *"Finished quickly, just wanted to get out and get on"*. Another two people liked the inexpensive fees required for studying. Two found VET good as preparation for further studies at university - in terms of study skills and knowledge - with two more people enjoying the fact that their VET study was cross-accredited into university courses.

In terms of a particular TAFE or training college, five people cited the location as especially good - allowing respondents to live at home with their parents and cutting down on travel time. Facilities - such as buildings, classrooms and computer equipment - were positively referred to by fourteen respondents. Four people liked aspects of TAFE administration - such as a fast and easy enrolment process, and effective procedures for dealing with student/teacher conflicts.

There were students who, while working full-time, had gone back to VET study through night-school or other means. Of this number, two respondents enjoyed the financial support from their employers so they could study. Four respondents actually saw their studies as helping with their present work environment: *"To walk into work and feel totally relaxed and comfortable is great"*. Some actually found that the employers looked on further study in a positive light, actively encouraging the respondents to improve their qualifications: *"My study gives me a better position for work"*.

<u>Negative Aspects.</u> The greatest focus for criticism in study for those respondents who found problems in their TAFE experiences, centred on the students' contact hours within the class. Fifteen respondents had major problems with particular teachers. Some teachers were just hard to understand, and some respondents did not like the fact that their teacher was perceived not to know the area they were teaching in well enough: *"They were absolutely useless, obvious they didn't know what they were doing when they asked really basic questions"*. Other teachers were hard to get in contact with outside of class, some would turn up to class whenever they wanted - leaving students waiting for them. This made some respondents quite angry, with the feeling that their teachers: *"Just got paid to teach and didn't care"*.

The actual classrooms and facilities were not seen as good enough by ten respondents. One person noted that their particular class was not given a room till half way through the year of an advanced certificate, and one interviewee found that their particular classroom was overcrowded - leaving little room for work. Computers were seen as important by some respondents, and sometimes computer facilities in TAFE (in particular) were outdated. In addition there was *"not much in the library"* and students were sometimes forced to go to universities to find required texts.

Another major area for concern for respondents centred on the quality of the courses. Nine people questioned the relevance of their course in terms of future work. Some of the subjects were seen as too theoretical- a waste of time in relation to what they would be doing in their respective industries, one respondent finding that they *"Had to relearn stuff in the workplace"*. In addition four people found that their courses were far behind present work practices: *"We were already outdated when we did the course (in terms of hardware and software)"; When we finished the course we found that the workplace had new versions of the stuff we had done"*.

Ten people were concerned about the quality of their VET courses, many finding their study too easy and not challenging enough. Teachers were seen to do too much for the students - *"Often we were spoon-fed"*. Certain subjects were perceived as limited in options, hard to get into at times, and lacking in any sort of depth. Several people also found the subject materials monotonous or boring at times. Some thought that they were being taught things they already knew. One respondent found that he became lazy in his course, as he saw that there was nothing worthwhile learning.

Ten interviewees found the going very hard in terms of work and time - particularly those who had returned to school from work or were trying to both work and study. Sometimes there would be no time between classes - no time to eat or rest. One person found it hard to attend night-school - balancing work/study and rest/relaxation. Others found that the pace of classes in the limited amount of time very hard to keep up with: *"There's a lot of information you have to assimilate in a fast-moving class"*. An apprentice found it very hard coming into TAFE once a fortnight and trying to achieve anything worthwhile in his practical classes: *"Sometimes you just don't get enough done in one day"*.

Related to this, perhaps, was the feeling six respondents had that they were isolated in their problems. There was a perceived lack of help from teachers and administration - *"Not enough contact time"* - and some people felt left out. Five respondents felt that they did not have enough information on the course - some not knowing what they were letting themselves in for when they first started (*"I didn't really read the course description carefully enough"*) and others not knowing where their course was heading while they were actually doing it. Another five echoed these criticisms in terms of their doing a new course, in that: *"Nothing was established, there was no history"*. People had the feeling that they were left out in limbo, never quite sure about where they were: *"Teachers weren't too sure about the format"; "No-one knew where they were going"*. The result of this was that people were frustrated in not knowing if they had done the right class.

Eight people were concerned about their respective schooling fees and ongoing costs - the amounts of money required for equipment and books which were not even used at times. After all of this, two respondents wondered if their courses were even worth doing, in terms of industry recognition: *"The certificate work is a hard year and like - whoopee do! - some people might not even recognise the certificate when you finished"*.

<u>*Improvements in VET.*</u> In terms of the respondents' ideas for improvements there is a focus on the specifics of a particular course or college. Nevertheless, it is possible to find some common themes running throughout the many responses.

Once again, people are concerned with their course in relation to their getting work. One respondent called for his VET course to *"Deal more with the real world rather than imaginary subjects"*. Two respondents thought it would be good to *"Try talking to the business sector more - get some input from them"*. The business sector needs to also be involved in providing a work-experience program for students; those people involved in monitoring specific industry courses (actual industry heads and key business people) could be used to help create these work experience programs. The courses should be brought up to date more often, and there could be *"A better understanding of the changing needs in the workplace"*. Two respondents actually found their studies so good - especially the practical aspects - they thought that the courses deserved more recognition from their respective industries: *"They should advertise what it offers"*.

Problems within class are also seen as major areas that could be improved. Three respondents wanted to see a bit more professionalism in the teaching - *"Turning up when they're supposed to"* and actually teaching rather than reiterating what was already in course-texts: *"I mean we might as well just study the book"*. One person suggested a mentor system, something he had come across in university, where an appointed teacher would be there to help students with specific course problems or to pass them on to people who could help.

Some people wanted to see changes in their courses. One person thought that their course needed more time to cover subjects in depth, rather than trying to cover everything in a small amount of time. Another respondent had the same suggestion of more time for the course in relation to the workloads of part-time students. Others thought that their courses took far too long and *"Some of the subjects are absolutely useless - get rid of them"*.

Within the VET system, some respondents felt that they were left on their own. Four respondents wanted more information about prospective courses (through VTAC guides and career advisers) and where they were actually heading when they were studying. One young woman, failing a subject and having a lot of trouble getting through the bureaucratic processes because of this, thought that there was a need to *"Clean up a lot of the admin process and don't leave students in the dark as to what is going on"*.

Four students who went through VET and continued on to other VET courses or university didn't like the cross-crediting - or the lack thereof - between institutions; they thought better counselling on the process and better recognition of what they had done previously was important.

*The University experience.* Of the 22 who went to both TAFE and university - whether they dropped out, graduated or changed courses - there were different feelings about their time at university. Three liked it because they thought it would give them more prestige in the job market. Two people liked the independence which went with university study. Another two liked the way their university course allowed for their specific lifestyle - whether working or bringing up children - through very good correspondence courses and weekend schools.

Many of the problems associated with university study were founded in the actual courses and teaching styles. Ten thought that their uni course was too abstract and general for them, and some doubted if any of it would ever be used: *"It's very theoretical, text-book based, you only memorised for the exam, no learning"*. In comparison to their VET classes, they did not like the lecture format; where it was felt that university teaching was *"more of a lecture to the class rather than everyone getting involved"*. As a result of this impersonal style of teaching, many of the respondents felt isolated: *"Pace was too fast, assumed we knew everything. Basically we were left on our own"; "You can't contact the teachers, they're all sessional. At uni you are only a number, no-one really cares"*. Five people also felt that the learning was above their heads and they were out of depth: *"It was a very advanced level - hard to follow. Maybe the teacher knew what they knew but we didn't."*

In terms of improvements, two respondents wanted to see greater student-teacher interactions - through greater consultations and dropping the larger lectures. Two more respondents wanted a greater focus in some of the courses - in particular Arts, which they saw as too general and without direction for students. Facilities could also be improved, especially parking(!) and the cafeterias.

*Common Themes.* Throughout this section there appear to be three major themes which constantly re-emerged in terms of how the respondents felt about their VET studies. Of most concern to students doing VET seemed to be the fact that they were there to gain access to work further down the track. This was a major dimension in respondents' intentions - as the section on *Complexity of Patterns* clearly shows - and it remains a concern for people as they progress through their studies. Secondly, students' contact hours within the classroom with their teachers and classmates were clearly important: from the point of view of the standard of the teaching; how people feel about the length and quality of their course; and how they actually coordinate their work and time to fit study into their lives. Thirdly, the respondents felt quite strongly about how they interacted within the system of their school or college, in that they wanted to do what they thought was best for them, and at the same time have the help of others in manipulating their chosen lifecourse.

## 3. *Gender and Regional Differences*

In examining the life and study experiences as participants progressed through VET, it appeared that there was a negligible amount of difference related to specific demographic characteristics. This could be at least partly a consequence of the limited nature of our interview sample. A relatively small sample of this kind could not be relied upon to uncover the general data typical of larger social research. Nevertheless, some common themes began to emerge in the personal experiences of respondents which required closer analysis.

*Gender.* Gender, in itself, was not mentioned as a major factor in any of the respondents' life-path decisions. In terms of intentions and pathways, though, there were some common experiences which could be identified along gender lines. Of the 44 females who had some sort of tertiary training, 23 had originally wanted to go to university. Of these, 18 actually ended up enrolling in a university - either they went straight through a university course into work, or they had to do a TAFE course first before entering university, or they did university and then dropped out to do a TAFE course or to work. It is also interesting to look at those young women who wanted to go straight into a VET course, in that the majority of them were very definite about the occupations they were hoping to get into - the textiles industry, nursing, child-care, design etc.

Following the study path of many of these younger women reveals a recurrence of this concentration along a particular track - even if there was a diversion from the original plan. As one female noted in her interest of becoming a teacher: *"I was quite happy to do things in my own time - I was willing to do things related to teaching if I couldn't teach"*. Another noted: *"I'm working now in a doctor's surgery, but I'm still looking over my shoulder"*. This particular pattern in life pathway could be seen as fitting the definition of the 'focused patterns' - indeed, nearly half of the females (21) fitted into this category. It was in the given motives for their particular decision - going through VET in particular - that some kind of greater picture began to emerge. While some of the female respondents mentioned job security and earning potential as major factors in their decisions (*"It's like a big money game, it keeps the mind occupied"*), many of them seemed to be looking for study/occupational pathways that would maximise life satisfaction and *"happiness"*. Indeed, many of them would actively pursue what they expected to be the best life-path for them and, if things do not work out, will change their focus, with life satisfaction as the underlying factor: *"It took me a while to find the right job but I finally got what I wanted... I'm happy where I am now"; "I will chop and change and do whatever I can to be happy"*. For those who had chosen their occupation and followed it through, some would still go back to TAFE; not so much to gain qualifications and improve work status, as to continue with their own search for a more satisfying job or lifestyle: *"I wanted to do something that interests me, I'm getting bored with the work routine after four years"; "I don't want to be State enrolled nurse for the rest of my life. Wiping bums isn't that fulfilling!"*

Males, in some cases, seemed to have this same 'agency' in determining where their life is going to go. Apprentices (who were all male) especially were focused on their particular career choices, even spending years to get into a career field that they wanted. One apprentice had tried ten times to get into an apprenticeship in the country before success; others did a year of study at TAFE in order to be acceptable for an apprenticeship. Others who went through different VET courses reflected this active focus on their wants and needs: *"I always wanted to be involved in film and I was prepared to do anything to get there"*.

Many of the males, though, were a bit unsure as to what they were going to be doing. The 13 males who had intended to do university were sometimes obscure as to

why they wanted to do tertiary study: *"I thought it was necessary to get a good job"; "You thought, like, the more education you had the better chance of getting work"*. Other males openly acknowledged that they had not been sure of where they were going to go or where they would end up: *"I wasn't really interested in what I was doing, didn't care what happened to me"; "Not worried about things - just cruisin' - anything that sorta grabbed me at the time"; "I just wanted to do something. I didn't want to sit around on the dole"*.

It could almost be said that VET has served to bring into focus the hazy ideas of many of these male respondents; a VET course acting as a possible 'gateway' into areas that might interest them further down the career path. As one male subject commented: *"At the start I didn't know what I wanted to do - pretty much got into a course and stuck with it. You take what you can get and try to stay with it"*. Indeed there are several respondents - apprentices included - who put across the view that once a niche has been found in their study, one should not actively try to change it: *"You've got to stay on with what you're doing - you have to keep on with what you've got"*. At the same time there were male respondents who found that they did not like what they were doing, had struggled to do the study, and ended up changing their course. While these people may not have succeeded in finding an area to continue in, their VET had helped them shape their future directions. A male respondent, for example, who dropped out of an engineering course after six weeks - because he hated it - decided to try out a TAFE course in wool-classing to keep busy, and continued on with it - proceeding on into a job in the wool industry.

Once again, it must be noted that this interview sample is not large enough to prove that gender itself plays a major role in attitudes and life-decisions; there is a large amount of crossover between males and females on this level. In this particular interview sample however it has been found that the majority of young women who go through VET look at their studies in terms of where they want to go, and a proportion of the young men look at VET or tertiary study as a means of helping them find their way.

*Regional Issues.* For analytical purposes, Victorian regions have been placed into two general groups; Metropolitan (Melbourne) and Rural (Geelong/Northern Victoria/ Gippsland) Victoria. Looking closer at Metropolitan groups, the major concern of many respondents, in relation to VET, was the location of a TAFE or college in relation to their family home. Fifty of the fifty-six metropolitan subjects reported that they were still living at home - citing the hardships of starting out on their own as a major reason. Their decisions on where they wanted to study rested largely on travel time to their local college or TAFE. This would seem to reflect the wider scope of courses and subjects available throughout the Metropolitan colleges, in that most students can find what they want to do close to home.

In contrast, fourteen of the twenty five Rural respondents had actually moved out of home; many of them into Melbourne. A major reason for those who moved from the country into the city was the lack of options in rural VET: *"If you really want to do tertiary study the only real options are in Melbourne"*. For those people who wanted to pursue a specific career, the smaller choices in courses and subjects at a rural college usually required them to move to Melbourne. One person who did not even want to move *had* to go to the city, and she tried to delay it until she felt "able to cope" with city-life.

For those who did move into Melbourne, there were several problems. Some had *"Huge difficulty in getting housing"*, others were not happy with public transport and the amount of time to get to school. Several found it harder to survive financially in the city - usually because of their ineligibility for Austudy - one *"Finding it difficult to survive let alone study"*. Isolation was also experienced by country students in a new environment.

At the same time, some rural respondents enjoyed their move - the city offering

a new lifestyle for many of them. Two people felt relief at getting away from their respective country towns - one citing the fact that her town was too small for her. For those who did have a smooth transition from rural Victoria to Melbourne, there seemed to be support systems of friends and family to aid them. Some had brothers or sisters to live with when they arrived - two people, a brother and sister, living in a household of five siblings. One respondent mentioned that at the end of VCE there was a whole group of country students moving to the city to study and work, and these friends help when you first move.

Three rural respondents who stayed at home, living within one or two hours of their Melbourne-based VET study, chose to commute into the city. They saw it as easier to have the financial security of living at home, than to actually move to the city. Problems for these people usually involved the strain of trying to work and study within the constraints of travel timetables: *"It threw me out, a bit time-consuming and tiring"; "Travel took it out of you"*. One respondent found that teachers and friends at school did not understand her difficult travel circumstances.

## 4. *Changed Perceptions*

There were some striking differences between people's advance perceptions of VET and their later experience of it. There was a significant shift from mainly negative preconceptions to highly positive re-assessments of the value of VET alternatives, thus showing a striking contrast between prior perceptions of what VET had to offer and the actual experience and outcomes of the participants.

Respondents were asked to compare their attitudes to VET in 1991 - during their final year of high school - with what they think of it now. For most of the sample, 1991 was the year of their matriculation in VCE and many of their concerns lay in what, they thought, was the natural progression from secondary to tertiary education; *"Wanted to get down and do my work. More inclined to see whatever will come"; "Just thought I would get into uni and worry about the rest later"*. This focus on a linear pathway from high school through to university, and there being nothing else, rested heavily on many of the participants' respective schools. As one person argued, schools *"Only promoted one pathway; lawyers and doctors, that was all they were interested in"*. It was argued that the reputation of a school rested on the number who went on to university or landed themselves decent jobs related to their qualifications; thus the strong promotion of tertiary education for the students.

***"The VCE at the time seemed like such a big deal. Now it just seems stupid worrying about it so much."***

If there was any interest in alternatives to university, respondents had found it hard to get information on it in secondary school; it was *"Too much trouble to go and get the materials and information yourself"*. There was *"No real help from the teachers"* and one *"Wasn't informed of what (TAFE) did"*. A respondent argued that there was *"Not much information on TAFE and their courses, everyone was too busy studying"*. Another got the impression that VET was looked down upon by schools because *"TAFE came for those where difficulties arose at the end of year 12"*. If there was to be any investigation of VET courses it was usually left to the individual to do it on their own: "TAFE *wasn't pushed at school. You had to do the application yourself."* and *"In the beginning of year 12 I didn't know much about (child-care courses) - but I researched it and found out a lot"*. A reflection of this school-based attitude could be found in the VTAC process for students in 1991, in that *"At the time, VTAC were not including TAFE in their application forms"*. One student found that, ironically, university itself was the first place to even push VET as a possibility, pointing out TAFE courses during an application interview.

In line with the school attitudes towards VET, many of the respondents in 1991 held overall positive views of university and parallel negative views of VET. It was perceived that a student *"Had to go to university, it was the be all and end all"*. One person *"Always thought that uni was IT, everyone had to get into uni if they could"*. In this pro-university atmosphere, VET was looked down upon - *"It was your second choice"*; *"Second best to uni"*; and *"A poor man's version of uni"*. As one student saw it *"TAFE was second best to uni; especially at the end of year 12. I would have repeated at the end of year 12 if I hadn't gotten into uni"*.

Extending beyond school influences and the conflicting attitudes between university and VET, there was also a negative perception of VET which was founded in peer group relationships and community attitudes. Some respondents talked of worrying about reactions from their friends and relatives to their studying VET: *"I wouldn't have been proud to tell people I was going to TAFE"*. As one respondent pointed out, candidly *"I'm embarrassed to tell people, I'll say I'm at RMIT, rather than RMIT TAFE"*. Another felt she *"Was only doing a TAFE course, and the others (friends) were doing real study and getting a 'real' certificate"*. Other respondents talked of having general negative attitudes which seemed to have come from their larger community. These sorts of attitudes commonly reflected generalisations which did not seem to be grounded in experience of TAFE or other VET colleges. By this VET was seen as 'scummy', 'crappy' or 'dodgy'; for 'builders/labourers, dickheads, dropouts and dumb people' - for those 'who couldn't get into university'; a series of male-oriented trade-schools; and a place to go to *"And then keep going to try and get out of it"*. There was a 'snobby attitude' towards VET and, as one person argues, there was a 'stigma' attached to those who did it.

There were some respondents who were more worried about the specifics of VET courses and qualifications. One worried about the vocational focus of a course and the concentration of their study into one area only; limiting the scope for other areas of interest. Another person thought that a basic VET course was a lot of time spent for what you got. Ten respondents came back to comparisons between university and TAFE in terms of qualifications - not too sure about the strength of a VET qualification in relation to a university degree.

### *"I didn't go to college and I have a job."*

Some people were not very interested in doing any sort of study - VET or university. The common perception here was that, after twelve or more years of education, they just wanted to work or do nothing. An intense dislike for school, and their idea that VET or tertiary education was just an extension of school, was the major factor for these people - *"Didn't like school, just wanted to finish and get a job"*; *"Stay away from TAFE - had enough in high school as it was"*; and *"I wasn't going back to school after VCE, that was it as far as I was concerned"*.

Others had an interest in doing TAFE from the very beginning - mainly those who displayed a focused pathway in their vocational interests. As mentioned previously, these respondents displayed active pursuit of information on their VET courses by themselves. On this level, VET offered the particular course which the person needed in their vocational pursuits - *"Uni wasn't on the level I wanted. TAFE was the better option for me because I could do what I wanted"*; *"Universities don't offer what I want"*. Some of the respondents who had a more positive outlook on VET depended on the amount of information passed on to them from those who had direct experience of VET. One respondent mentioned industry people who talked of the number of impressive graduates coming through TAFE courses, impacting on his own decision to pursue a TAFE course. Another mentioned a good careers person at their school, who helped direct students into TAFE if they were interested in it. Many of the apprentices had parents, siblings, or friends who had their own experiences of apprenticeships and passed this on.

Judging by the nature of the majority of negative preconceptions of VET and the corresponding small amount of positive ones, it appears that most of it was determined by the quality of information which was passed on. Those who had little or no information on actual VET courses relied on generalisations and commonalities which gave a negative outlook on VET; those who had more first-hand information through friends/teachers/family displayed a more positive attitude towards VET.

This assessment is strongly supported by the clear changes in attitudes towards VET between 1991 and 1996; in that those who had negative ideas on VET changed their minds when they actually came to study there. As one person explained, in her VCE year *"TAFE wasn't considered, the degree was the be all and end all"*. Now, with the benefit of TAFE study, she sees her past attitude as *"A completely stupid idea. I wanted experience with my schooling"*.

### *"Go for it; just do it."*

People were happy with their VET experiences - *"Best two years of my life"*; *"Fabulous, much more positive"*; *"Fantastic!"*; *"Highly recommend it"* - for a variety of reasons. Some saw their in-class experiences as the main factor in their change of perspective: because of their teachers - *"They treated you more professionally, with a bit more respect"*; *"You get to know the teachers really well and you end up wanting to work with them"*; - and classmates *"You get to meet all sorts of different people"*; there is *"A good demographic spread"*. Others saw TAFE as a positive start to tertiary education - something which had not been in their reckoning when finishing year 12: it's *"Better to do it the building block way. That is, TAFE first and then onto uni"*.

### *"It's paid off literally. I'm working."*

The main aspect of VET which respondents came across, and which changed their ideas on it, was the focus on vocational training: *"They (TAFE) prepared you for the workforce"*; *"Wider set-up to encompass larger areas of employment"*; *"For students who know what they want to do in a short time"*. This especially came out for those who did end up going on to university and were able to compare both VET and tertiary education. University was a disappointment for some in comparison to VET because one was never sure of what use their abstract learning would be in the workplace - *"In uni you just line up and you are doled out your education. You'd be told x=y=z, but you wouldn't know what it meant"*; *"At uni you're still not taught industry skills, they only prepare you for what they are going to teach you in third and fourth year"*; university is *"Too theoretical on its own, you need TAFE to provide the practical side"*. One respondent, noting the experience of a university law student in her office, found that *"University needs to prepare students better for work - they have no idea when they get into the workforce"*.

Five respondents still maintained their previous stance on VET in 1996. Of these five, however, four had not done a VET course (one was long-term unemployed, two had gone to university only, and one had been working for five years). Three respondents, two presently university students, saw VET as good for a 'particular' kind of student, *"Catering for a particular kind of skill, a more hands on approach, whereas unis train you to be managers"* - *"If you're better with your hands than your brain then that's the place for you"*; and *"TAFE, etcetera, is aimed at the working class person"*.

Other respondents who had never taken part in VET had heard through their friends and workmates that it may be 'pretty good'. The previously mentioned long-term unemployed respondent had heard some good things about it and, after three years of looking for work, was considering looking into a hairdressing course. Another respondent who had gone straight into the workforce from school referred to his best friend, who had done an apprenticeship through TAFE and followed it up with short courses, as a positive result of VET - leading him to think of doing a TAFE course. Others are encouraged by employers and workmates to do TAFE courses for promotions - with fees paid by the employer.

*"I now tell people I go to TAFE and I don't flinch."*

The overall glowing praise regarding VET after having done it, and the previously negative ideas associated with it while doing VCE in 1991, serve to reinforce the argument that VET perceptions can change, from generalisation and hearsay, into recognition and information linked with actual knowledge of the 'VET experience'; all of which may be influenced by peers at home and at work. The respondent who had previously been too ashamed to tell anyone that she went to a TAFE, sums it up best in saying *"I'm happy to say I am at TAFE. Many people at the bank are doing TAFE courses. Friends and family are proud of me just continuing study while working full time...it's good to have their support"*.

## 5. *Cohort-specific Issues*

In looking at the interview sample it is important to note some dimensions of the group which could be seen to be specifically related to the fact that they all made their transition from school at the beginning of the 1990s in Victoria.

Of major importance to nearly half of the group was the fact that they did their Victorian Certificate of Education in 1991. Common Assessment Tasks (CATs) were in a state of transition between internal and external assessments, and exams were still assigned at the end of the year - resulting in a heavy workload by the students' reckoning. This state of change also created a feeling amongst many of these students that they were 'guinea pigs' and they didn't know where they were going. Because of this, several people blame the VCE system for their lower marks and the resultant search for alternative studies besides university. Related to this, perhaps, was the fact that university Anderson scores in 1991/92 had increased to the point beyond possible entrance for respondents in the particular course they wanted to do; once again resulting in a search for alternative courses.

Another typical characteristic of the sample's age group is the tendency to leave the family home at a later age. At the time of the interviews, 61 of the 81 respondents were still living at home. Many of those still living at home enjoyed the financial security they had with their family supporting them - the small amount of Austudy making it extremely hard for students to live independently.

The economic climate which may have contributed to this state has also served as a factor in decisions to continue study (as mentioned in the *Complexity of Patterns* section). Many of these people see an economy that is not conducive to providing jobs, and they hope that education or training, qualifications included, will offer the best means of employment.

The detail in these interview records is present over page in summary form. Chart 4 gives data about patterns of choice and subsequent progress.

**Chart 4. Summary Findings on Patterns and Progress**

*Focused Patterns. 37 of the 81 were 'focused'* - 16 male and 21 female. 23 planned full-time study and 10 wanted an apprenticeship. Interviews show they are cautious about taking risks, and while money is an issue, job satisfaction (and thus life satisfaction) rates more highly.

Overall, *26 out of the 37 could be said to be satisfied* or even very satisfied with their lot.

*Mixed Patterns. 35 had taken a less straight-forward path.* 28 of the 35 planned full-time study, but were more prepared to take a risk than the focused group. All possible combinations were covered: TAFE (8), University (2), TAFE and part-time work (9), TAFE to University (8), TAFE to University and back to TAFE (1), University to TAFE and back to University (1) and apprentices (4).

15 of the 35 did not get their first preference but are satisfied now, and while *most (24 of the 35) are happy* with where they have reached, there is *still a yearning to have 'done better'.*

*Altered Patterns. Only 9 of the 81* fit into this category. Of the 9, six intended to go to University and to study full time. Only 3 ended up doing this, and all 3 dropped out. 6 of the 9 changed courses at some point.

The theme of 'education = employment = life satisfaction' is still strong with them, but *only* 3 said with any conviction that they *were satisfied* with their lot.

*************************

*Gender Patterns.* Nearly half of the females (21) displayed 'focused patterns' - many will actively pursue what they see as their best life-path and, if things do not work out, will change their focus, with life satisfaction as the underlying factor. Apprentices (who were all male) were also focused, but many of the other males seemed unsure as to what they were aiming for, but thought that VET has helped them shape their future directions.

*In general, it seems that the majority of the young women look at their studies in terms of where they want to go, and more of the males look at VET as a means of helping them find their way.*

Overall, the findings from the interviews particularly with regard to VET can be summarised in the following way:

**Chart 5. Summary Findings on Assessment of VET**

*Positive Aspects of VET.* 72 of the 81 had something positive to say , and of most importance was the *practicality* of a course - the *relevance* it will have in the workplace. 27 noted the teaching and teachers as a positive aspect, related to their *teachers' experience* within their particular industry, and that the *teachers spent time to help* out students. 17 people saw their study as development or growth in their knowledge, skills and confidence.

*Negative Aspects of VET.* 15 had major problems with particular teachers. 10 criticised classrooms and facilities; 9 questioned the relevance of their course; and 10 felt that it was not challenging enough. 10 found the going hard in terms of work and time - particularly those returning to school from work or combining work and study. Lack of information, difficulties with cross-crediting, isolation, costs and the need to up-date some courses were also indicated.

*Regional issues. Proximity* to the family home was important. 50 of the 56 from Melbourne were still living at home, but 14 of the 25 rural respondents had moved (many of them into Melbourne) and cited problems with *lack of options in rural VET*, and with housing, finance, and isolation once they moved.

*Changed Perceptions.* Most significantly, for the overwhelming majority of participants there was a dramatic shift from negative preconceptions to highly positive re-assessments of the value of VET alternatives.

# 4. Post-school Pathways - Participant Perceptions (2)

In mid-1996, a more detailed questionnaire about their pathways and outcomes was completed by those participating in the Project. This survey covered such areas as their family background, living arrangements, employment situation, courses of study and their suitability and effectiveness, feelings of success or otherwise, and expectations about future outcomes and careers. For the purposes of this report we shall concentrate particularly on those findings which throw light on the respondents' participation in and pathways through vocational education and training. However a summary of the main general findings is provided here by way of introduction.

## The 1996 Large Questionnaire

The Follow Up questionnaire was sent to our 1995/6 'Studying' and Non-Study participants. In all a total of 1,908 returns were processed for the purposes of this report - female respondents made up 65 per cent of the returns as against 35 per cent of males.

### 1. *The Sample*

Five per cent of the sample had left school prior to Year 12, while 60 per cent had attended Government schools, 23 per cent Catholic, and the remaining 17 per cent were from Independent or other school backgrounds.

Ninety per cent were Australian-born, but a significant proportion had parents from other countries. Only 67 per cent of male parents and 65 per cent of female parents were born in Australia, with about 20 per cent of each coming from Europe and a further 6 per cent from Asia.

**Table 19. Family Country of Origin**

| | Father (%) | Mother (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Australia | 62 | 65 |
| Other English-speaking | 8 | 7 |
| European | 21 | 19 |
| Asian | 6 | 6 |
| Other | 3 | 3 |

The occupational status of the male parents was given as mainly professional/managerial (33 per cent), tradespersons (14.5 per cent), small business (13 per cent), and labourers (11 per cent). The female parents were mainly involved in home duties (36 per cent), office work (16 per cent), and the professional/managerial area (15 per cent).

**Table 20. Parental Occupations**

| | Father (%) | Mother (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Professional | 33 | 15 |
| Farmer | 8 | 3 |
| Small business | 13 | 7 |
| Home Duties | 2 | 36 |
| Clerical/Office worker | 4 | 16 |
| Sales | 2 | 4 |
| Tradesperson | 14 | 0 |
| Factory worker or labourer | 11 | 5 |
| Other | 12 | 14 |

Most of the parents had not themselves participated in much post-compulsory education and training of a formal kind. For the male parents, 19 per cent had university degrees, 15 per cent had trade qualifications, but 44 per cent had not even completed Year 12. As many as 54 per cent of the female parents did not have Year 12, while 13 per cent had university degrees.

**Table 21. Parental Education**

| | Father (%) | Mother (%) |
|---|---|---|
| University degree | 19 | 13 |
| Other Tertiary qualification | 10 | 12 |
| Trade Certificate | 15 | 2 |
| Year 12 | 8 | 12 |
| Less than Year 12 | 44 | 54 |
| Other | 4 | 4 |

The majority of the Follow Up respondents had grown up in metropolitan Melbourne (64 per cent) while about 34 per cent were non-metropolitan (with 18 and 16 per cent respectively from large, or small, country towns). In 1996, there were still 16 and 11 per cent in large, or small, country towns, and at least 20 per cent of the total sample indicated a non-metropolitan setting as their likely future address.

**Table 22. Locality (% Response)**

| | School-years | Currently | In 5 Years time |
|---|---|---|---|
| in Melbourne | 63 | 67 | 61 |
| in another capital city | 0 | 4 | 9 |
| in a large country town | 17 | 16 | 13 |
| in a small country town | 16 | 11 | 7 |
| other | 4 | 2 | 10 |

Since leaving school in the early nineties the vast majority have continued to live with their parents - 72 per cent give that as their main place of residence during these years and even now 62.5 per cent are still living in the family home. Even so, 60 per cent indicate that they have already completed post-school studies, while over 61 per cent have had full-time jobs at some stage.

**Table 23. Place of Residence (% Response)**

| | During Studies | Currently |
|---|---|---|
| with parents or guardians | 72 | 63 |
| by myself | 5 | 5 |
| with a spouse or partner | 7 | 11 |
| with friends | 15 | 17 |
| other | 4 | 4 |

Of the total sample, 5 per cent have been married, while 33 per cent have at some time been on unemployment benefits. Currently about half (49 per cent) have full-time jobs and a further 26 per cent are working part-time. Only 35 per cent consider their present job to be 'in my preferred career area' with a further 20 per cent in one that is a 'stepping stone' related to that career area. Apart from these jobs, the other main source of income indicated (by 15 per cent) is that of study allowances. As far as the future is concerned, the majority (66 per cent) are ambitioning professional/managerial careers, and almost all of these 'realistically expect' to achieve this (61 per cent).

**Table 24. Future Employment**

| | Would like (%) | Expected (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Professional/management | 66 | 61 |
| Farmer | 1 | 1 |
| Small business | 7 | 5 |
| Home Duties | 1 | 1 |
| Clerical/Office worker | 4 | 9 |
| Sales | 2 | 3 |
| Tradesperson | 3 | 4 |
| Factory worker or labourer | 0 | 1 |
| Other | 16 | 15 |

It is not surprising, therefore, that 81 per cent believe that there is a strong or very strong link between further study and better jobs, and that 72 per cent think this is definitely true in their own case.

## 2. *Study Experience*

Of the Follow Up respondents, 90 per cent have done further study since 1992, with two-thirds spending at least three years. Almost half (49 per cent) have combined study and work for most or all of that time, with only 17 per cent who have rarely or never tried to combine the two. A quarter of the total sample state that they 'prefer to do both', but 20 per cent indicate that work tends to take priority while 22 per cent say they need to do both but find it difficult to combine them.

**Table 25. Study Difficulties (% Response)**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| A. | My work tends to take priority | 23 |
| B. | I need the work but would prefer to study full-time | 19 |
| C. | I would prefer to do both | 28 |
| D. | I need both, but I find it difficult to combine them | 25 |
| E. | I'd like both, but have had trouble finding a job | 8 |
| F. | I'd prefer to work without having to study | 16 |
| G. | I'd prefer to study without having to work | 29 |

While the majority have been studying for at least three years, there are those amongst them who have changed around. Of the total sample, for instance, 18 per cent have changed to a different institution, 22 per cent have changed courses, and 14 per cent have discontinued.

Over 70 per cent (1,347 of the total 1,908 respondents) had made the university their first preference, but initially of those who did eventually study (1,717) only 64 per cent (1,104) gained university entry. Although only 11 per cent had sought entry into TAFE as their first preference, 24 per cent actually enrolled. In looking back on their eventual choice, only 7 per cent were in any way disappointed about it.

**Table 26. Enrolment**

| | Preference (%) | Outcome (%) |
|---|---|---|
| university | 78 | 64 |
| TAFE | 11 | 24 |
| Apprenticeship | 4 | 3 |
| Traineeship | 1 | 1 |
| Other | 6 | 8 |

By 1996, 1224 (64 per cent) had gained entry into university study (some having done TAFE as well), and of these 83 per cent were satisfied with their studies, while of the 761 (40 per cent) who had studied elsewhere 82 per cent were also satisfied. It is interesting, however, to compare the reactions of the parents to these different study outcomes. University students reported that 81 per cent of the parents were pleased and 15 per cent encouraging about their enrolment, while those in other courses reported a lower proportion as pleased (55 per cent) made up for by more of them showing encouragement (32 per cent). As far as these students in other courses were concerned, the most positive aspects were the facilities or buildings (60 per cent rated these as 'good' rather than fair or poor), the teaching (57 per cent) and staff interest in the students (60 per cent).

Two of the questions asked the students to give comparative ratings to the university and other studies. A summary of the main responses is given in Table 27. Further detail on these items will be provided later in this chapter.

**Table 27. Student assessments of merits of courses of study**

| *Assessment* | *agree or agree strongly (%)* |
|---|---|
| universities set higher standards | 73 |
| universities are more highly regarded | 94 |
| university leads to higher paid jobs | 66 |
| TAFE courses are more practical | 67 |
| TAFE should be more highly regarded | 68 |
| TAFE courses are useful for employment | 92 |
| and are relevant for personal development | 74 |
| and are worth recommending to others | 71 |

## 3. *Broader Concerns*

One section of the questionnaire asked the respondents some broader questions about their life experience and also their expectations about the future. In general, the responses in this section were very positive and appeared to reflect high levels of support and approval from their family and friends. The major themes are presented below.

Most of those responding indicated that the most positive aspects of their life since leaving school were the support they had received from their family (86 per cent), their closest friend (80 per cent) and other friends (69 per cent). Most were also positive about their work situation (64 per cent), their course of studies (70 per cent) and, overwhelmingly, 'what I've learnt about myself' (84 per cent).

When asked about the characteristics of a desirable job, most felt that what was most important or important was that 'the job is a secure one' (96 per cent) and 'full-time' (86 per cent). Table 28 gives the comparative 'very important' ratings for job characteristics.

**Table 28. Assessment of job characteristics**

| *The job is:* | *rated very important (%)* |
|---|---|
| secure | 61 |
| full-time | 56 |
| well-paid | 36 |
| involves services to the community | 20 |
| involves responsibility over others | 13 |
| 'high status' | 13 |
| unionised | 5 |

Not many of the respondents suggested that they would be particularly happy to end up in similar work to that of their male (28 per cent) or female (20 per cent) parent, but most would be definitely unhappy to have only casual work (68 per cent), be dependent on welfare (95 per cent) or be involved in home duties only (82 per cent). Other eventualities also struck some negative chords. Over 91 per cent of those replying would be unhappy or very unhappy about not having a full-time job, while high levels of unhappiness were also indicated concerning never being married (75 per cent), not having any children (77 per cent) or being an unmarried parent (65 per cent).

As we saw earlier, the respondents were very positive about support from their parents and friends. Some further questions reinforced this finding and indicated that both their male (65 per cent) and female (72 per cent) parents had been very encouraging about their studies and also approving (64 and 69 per cent respectively) of what they had done since. When they turned to give some consideration of 'the characteristics that make up an adult life', items related to personal autonomy were given greatest weight. Table 29 gives the ranking for items considered very important.

**Table 29. Characteristics of adult life**

| *Characteristic* | *rating as very important (%)* |
|---|---|
| financial independence | 77 |
| making own choices/decisions | 70 |
| emotional maturity | 68 |
| a secure job | 65 |
| taking responsibility for things | 61 |
| getting on well with people | 60 |
| sticking to one's principles | 47 |
| owning one's own home | 42 |
| voting rights | 40 |
| moving out from the family home | 39 |
| academic/training qualifications | 32 |
| living with a partner | 28 |
| having authority over others | 5 |

When asked how easy or hard it had been to develop these characteristics, most respondents (69 per cent) felt it had been quite hard to varying degrees, but probably no harder than it had been for either their parents or their friends and work associates.

Finally they were asked what they thought they would be doing five years from now. Table 30 gives the main expectations.

**Table 30. Five years from now**

| *situation* | *very likely or likely (%)* |
|---|---|
| employed | 82 |
| married | 48 |
| in authority | 45 |
| wealthy | 31 |
| a parent | 23 |
| self-employed | 12 |
| in a casual job | 9 |
| unemployed | 1.5 |

Overall, the picture that emerges from this study is one of high-aspiring qualified young adults who fully expect to enter into full-time professional employment with little risk of irregular or intermittent work and in a living partnership with a similarly secure professional. Given these types of attitudes and expectations, it was of particular interest to us in this study to determine how the high levels of aspiration manifested by the participants might affect their comparative assessments of the VET and university pathways.

## 4. *Comparative Assessments of VET*

Our analysis of the 1,908 survey returns considered the types of post-secondary courses undertaken and the students' assessments of the relative merits of VET and university study. A small group of respondents had not been involved in study of any kind. Of the total group, however, there were 460 (27 per cent) who had been involved in Vocational Education and Training settings, a further 296 (18 per cent) who had experience in both VET and university settings, and a final 916 (54 per cent) who had only been to university.

Of the combined total of 756 who were familiar with VET settings, 612 (81 per cent) were either satisfied or very satisfied about their studies. This group of respondents was also asked their assessment of a number of aspects of the institutions they had attended. The majority (60 per cent) rated the condition of the buildings highly, 61 per cent considered that staff interest in the students was good and at least 57 per cent also rated their teaching as good. The actual administration of courses and students' social life was considered less than good by a majority. The overall responses to particular items are given in Table 31.

**Table 31. Rating of VET Characteristics (% Responses)**

| | good | fair | poor |
|---|---|---|---|
| Condition of buildings | 60 | 33 | 7 |
| Library facilities | 45 | 38 | 17 |
| Quality of teaching | 57 | 37 | 6 |
| Administration services | 40 | 48 | 12 |
| Staff interest in students | 61 | 33 | 6 |
| Social life | 41 | 41 | 18 |
| Disability support | 34 | 54 | 12 |
| Child-care provision | 30 | 41 | 29 |
| Student counselling | 35 | 49 | 16 |
| Course advice | 43 | 44 | 13 |

All the participants (including those with only university experience) were asked for their response to a number of statements of a comparative kind concerning TAFE and university studies. While the overwhelming majority considered that the universities set higher standards and were more highly regarded, there was still a majority view that 'TAFE should be more highly regarded' (68 per cent) and opposition to the suggestion that 'TAFE courses are not of high quality' (62 per cent). There was a substantial 'no opinion' figure on some items. This is accounted for by those with only university backgrounds and who therefore were understandably reluctant to make judgements directly concerned with non-university settings. The overall response to these items is shown in Table 32.

**Table 32. Comparisons between VET and University Courses (%)**

| | strongly agree | agree | no opinion | disagree | strongly disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Universities set higher standards | 35 | 38 | 13 | 12 | 2 |
| Universities are more highly regarded | 61 | 33 | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| I think universities are over-rated | 13 | 29 | 23 | 30 | 5 |
| TAFE is more likely to lead to a job | 5 | 19 | 41 | 31 | 4 |
| University leads to higher-paid jobs | 23 | 42 | 17 | 16 | 1 |
| TAFE courses are more practical | 16 | 51 | 22 | 10 | 1 |
| TAFE courses are not of high quality | 1 | 9 | 28 | 50 | 12 |
| TAFE should be more highly regarded | 17 | 50 | 26 | 6 | 1 |
| TAFE is for those who miss out | 4 | 19 | 17 | 38 | 22 |

There are some differences in responses from those who only had done university courses by comparison with those who only had experience in VET, and those who had done both VET and university studies. The main areas of disagreement are shown in Table 33.

**Table 33. Differences between VET and University Respondents(%)**

| | | agreement | disagreement |
|---|---|---|---|
| I think universities are over-rated | uni only | 30 | |
| | uni/VET | 49 | |
| | VETonly | 61 | |
| TAFE should be more highly regarded | uni only | 59 | |
| | uni/VET | 75 | |
| | VETonly | 80 | |
| TAFE is for those who miss out | uni only | | 55 |
| | uni/VET | | 61 |
| | VETonly | | 68 |

Opinions about the effectiveness of VET courses are shown in Table 34. While a high proportion of the university students again settled for the 'no opinion' option, it is significant that they did choose to commit themselves either positively or negatively on those items regarding the relationship between VET courses and future employment and whether undertaking TAFE courses was worthwhile or not.

**Table 34. Opinions About VET Courses (% Responses)**

| | strongly agree | agree | no opinion | disagree | strongly disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| useful for future employment | 28 | 63 | 7 | 2 | 0 |
| relevant for personal development | 18 | 57 | 23 | 2 | 0 |
| worth recommending to others | 18 | 53 | 26 | 2 | 1 |
| a waste of time | 0 | 2 | 14 | 53 | 31 |
| generally well-organised | 5 | 41 | 49 | 4 | 1 |
| generally well-taught | 6 | 41 | 49 | 3 | 1 |
| generally not very demanding | 3 | 19 | 44 | 28 | 6 |
| at least as good as the university | 5 | 24 | 43 | 24 | 4 |
| generally better than I'd expected | 6 | 27 | 61 | 6 | 0 |
| generally worse than I'd expected | 0 | 3 | 63 | 25 | 9 |

The vast majority of all respondents agreed with the suggestion that VET was 'useful for future employment' (91 per cent) and disagreed with the opinion that TAFE was 'a waste of time' (84 per cent). On some of the other items in this question, there were major differences of opinion depending on the degree of familiarity the respondents had with different types of courses, as indicated in Table 35.

**Table 35. Differences of Opinion About VET Courses (%)**

| | | agreement |
|---|---|---|
| worth recommending to others | uni only | 58 |
| | uni/VET | 85 |
| | VETonly | 86 |
| generally well-organised | uni only | 24 |
| | uni/VET | 67 |
| | VETonly | 75 |
| generally well-taught | uni only | 23 |
| | uni/VET | 69 |
| | VETonly | 81 |
| generally better than I'd expected | uni only | 10 |
| | uni/VET | 53 |
| | VETonly | 62 |

In particular, those with some direct personal experience of VET study were much more positive (over seventy per cent in agreement) than their university counterparts about how well-organised and well taught their courses were. Over fifty per cent of those with some form of VET exposure agreed that their experience had been 'generally better than I'd expected' while 85 per cent of those with both VET and university backgrounds and 86 per cent with only VET experience considered that it was 'worth recommending to others'.

Overall, the assessment of VET courses by this sample of students (including those with only university experience) is very positive and in marked contrast to other survey findings based on the attitudes of senior secondary students.

## General Comment

It is clear from both the interview sub-set and the larger survey sample that, on reflection, the evidence concerning participants' experiences of, and considered judgements about, their VET pathways is overwhelmingly positive. At the general level of assessment regarding the value and usefulness of VET courses, the positive judgements of those with direct experience of such courses is also shared by those whose further education has been restricted to university settings only. Perhaps what is most striking is that those with experience in both the university and the VET settings express strong support and approval of, and even a preference for, the VET alternative. As was evident in the interview findings, there is a dramatic contrast between the prior negative attitudes of the participants towards VET in their final year at school and their subsequent high levels of regard. It is not surprising therefore that well over 80 per cent of them have no hesitation in affirming that the VET pathway is 'worth recommending to others'. A summary is provided in Chart 6.

**Chart 6. Summary of Survey Findings**

- A majority of VET students give a good rating to the condition of buildings, the quality of teaching and staff interest in students
- Both VET and university students consider TAFE courses more practical and that they should be more highly regarded
- While 30 per cent of university students agree that 'universities are over-rated', this is the view of most VET students, including those who have also attended university
- The majority of both VET and university students disagree that 'TAFE is for those who miss out'
- A majority also see VET as useful for future employment, relevant for personal development, and worth recommending to others, and are likely to strongly disagree that TAFE courses are 'a waste of time'
- By contrast with university students, three-quarters of those with direct experience of VET courses agree that they are well-organised and well-taught.

# 5. The VET Provider Response

In August 1996 we published a *Summary of Interim Findings* from the Project which reported on some of the data which had been gathered through the 1996 Interview Sample and from the first 50 per cent of returns from the Large Questionnaire which had been received to that time. Copies of the Summary were forwarded to a selection of people who expressed an interest in the Project and a willingness to assist in its second, consultative phase. Recipients were requested to read the Summary and to consider their responses to aspects of the data which it reported. We gathered these responses through a series of meetings and interviews during the period October to December 1996.

## Main Themes

The consultative phase involved contact with and input from approximately forty people, predominantly TAFE institute staff members with middle level management responsibilities, but also careers teachers in secondary schools and others with professional and research interests related to VET. All were from Victoria. Responses were framed by eight specific questions which covered the following general areas:

- the attitudes towards VET of students in their final school years, the bases for these attitudes, and shifts in these attitudes following post-school experience of VET;
- provisions made for communicating information about VET programs and experience to students in their final school years;
- provisions made within VET to meet the needs of students - in relation to special and support facilities, course design, timetabling, teaching methods, etc and with reference to student groups such as those from rural areas, and those combining work and study, returning to study, or changing study directions;
- the scope for student pathway changes within further and higher education to be efficiently facilitated through recognition and crediting arrangements;
- the outlook for VET given recent policy developments.

Exchanges during the consultative phase took post-school vocational education and training as being that provided by TAFE institutes and private VET providers. The participation of universities in vocational education was frequently acknowledged but this was not a matter under discussion.

The responses from the consultative phase have enabled us to add a further perspective to that gathered from the 1992-95 students. Analysis of the responses has been shaped by the aim of the Project, as noted in preceding chapters, 'to examine student aspirations, experience and outcomes in order to identify barriers to participation in and effective delivery of programs in Vocational Education and Training'.

By way of introduction to the type of feed-back we have received from VET providers, the four propositions in Chart 7 provide a useful summary.

**Chart 7. Providers: Main Response Themes**

1. The providers confirm from their own studies and experience during the early 1990s a clear trend for young people who entered TAFE programs to see their TAFE experience as more satisfying than they had expected before or at commencement.

2. The providers' experience also confirms our finding that, for school leavers in the late 1980s and early 1990s, ignorance of what TAFEs had to offer and prejudicial attitudes towards TAFE appeared to be major factors influencing the level of consideration given to VET programs.

3. The providers are confident from their more recent experience and monitoring that many of the circumstances resulting in bias against TAFE and ignorance of the TAFE experience have changed so that barriers to consideration of VET have been lowered. A "slow turnaround" in awareness of and attitudes toward VET is perceived.

4. The providers are further confident that the tendency for students' actual experience of VET to exceed their prior expectations has been maintained.

## Specific Issues

Underlying these main themes there were some specific issues and concerns expressed during the consultation phase of this Project. The following discussion elaborates several observations drawn from those consultations.

1. ***School students in their final years are likely to be exposed to a bias against the VET/TAFE option present in the community generally, in their parents' attitudes and among their peers.***

Coming out of the 1980s many parents maintained perceptions of TAFE based on the old "tech-college" images prevalent when they were school leavers - a "second-best" image thought to lead to factory-type employment and lower level living standards. In a nation without a tradition of respect and prestige for technological education, many parents saw universities as the means whereby their children could escape the less pleasing aspects of their own working lives.

From the late 1980s the Federal Government sponsored a rapid expansion of the university sector through the implementation of the Unified National System and increased numbers of student places, and gave encouragement to students and their families to retain school enrolments through to Year 12. Secondary schools sought to build their retention rates as a mark of successful performance and used the percentages of their leavers gaining university entrance as an important promotional tool. Greater numbers of children than ever before in all communities gained university entrance.

All of this sustained the general parental preference for university entrance and provided little basis for challenge to the bias against TAFE-based VET.

2. ***Developments in secondary schooling created an effective barrier to adequate information on the VET/TAFE option being available to school students in their final years.***

Together with the push for retention through to Year 12, structural changes in secondary schooling and to the curriculum for the final years meant the earlier patterns which had streamed many school leavers into VET had been disrupted. The curriculum changes sought to offer a more inclusive and comprehensive program in the final years rather than one which streamed students into so-called and exclusive academic and technical pathways. As we have already noted elsewhere, staying on at school and completing the new curriculum became associated in everyone's' minds with the gaining of entry to a university. TAFE institutes, industry groups and schools had not effectively geared up the necessary information systems to match the new arrangements.

At the end of the 1980s careers teachers in schools tended to be caught up in the retention and university entrance drive and most teachers dealing with Year 12 students reflected their own university experience and modelled this.

It seems likely that an indirect effect of the emphasis on university entry was poor access to information on VET for school leavers. This set up as much or more of a barrier to school leaver contemplation of VET as did direct prejudice against VET.

3. ***Senior school students are now more likely to have direct experience of VET and related activities.***

Direct experience of VET and associated experiences provide school students with opportunities to become more informed about possible post-school VET options and counteract prejudicial attitudes towards VET. As the changes to the structure of school programs for the final years have proceeded, effort has been made to provide a more comprehensive curriculum to serve the needs of a wider range of students. The development of VET studies has been encouraged, and many schools have responded to the employment difficulties experienced by young people and heightened community and family expectations that schooling should maximise employment opportunities.

TAFE institute staff and careers teachers observe that whereas schools originally viewed VET programs as options for students unlikely to gain university entrance, there is now a tendency for a wider range of students to consider them as part of a more balanced set of studies which open up a wider range of post-school options.

In Victoria the "dual recognition" provisions now allow Years 11 and 12 studies which are partly delivered and fully credited by TAFE institutes to be an integral part of the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and so "count" for all tertiary admission purposes. The TAFE institute components are typically delivered at the TAFE campus. This initiative is identified by both TAFE and school staff as a key factor in the "slow turnaround" in the apparent awareness of VET post-school options of school leavers. Increasing numbers of schools have also expanded work experience components in their curricula - especially at Years 9-11 levels, and some have introduced their own specialist vocational certificate programs at Years 11 and 12 levels. Usually these certificate programs are developed in consultation with a local TAFE institute and recognised by it for the purposes of subsequent admission.

All of these arrangements and a more established pattern of visits by school students to TAFE campuses and of senior TAFE students and graduates to schools as

part of TAFE information programs have increased the level of direct experience of VET by school students. All of them bring the students into contact with people who are likely to stimulate them to give consideration to VET options.

It seems clear that the more successful interaction there is between a TAFE institute and a school or a cluster of district schools and the more the students of those schools directly experience VET, the higher will be the level of student interest in, and applications for admissions to VET programs. Experience is showing that where the interaction is sustained through the establishment phase it may reach a "take-off point" which ensures the necessary continuing levels of student enrolment for dual recognition type programs.

However, the overall scope of these developments must not be exaggerated. There is great variation from school to school, many having little or no enthusiasm for taking up TAFE institute partnership opportunities because they choose to maintain a single focus on "academic" programs and university entrance. In those schools which have taken up the opportunity for TAFE partnership the workload for staff, especially through the establishment phase, can be onerous and it often falls on those teachers whose interests and responsibilities in relation to VET means that their workloads are expanding on multiple fronts.

Further, the exposure to VET-related experiences which school students are having tends to be subject to familiarity factors. Students are interested in programs in areas they are already familiar with through family contact or general patterns in their community. There is less momentum or encouragement to enter fields which are "new" or "not traditional" for members of their social or gender group or not represented in their community.

### 4. *Good quality information relevant to the VET option is now more readily available to senior school students.*

TAFE institutes believe they have improved their performances in the areas of general promotion and marketing and the provision of information and assistance to key teachers involved with final year school students. Teachers confirm this.

TAFE institutes commonly have schools liaison officers who supply information to careers and Year 12 teachers, deal with incoming queries from schools, link teachers to particular departments, and participate in careers teachers' networks. Complementing more general and public advertising and promotion campaigns which serve, among other things, to raise parental awareness of TAFE opportunities, most TAFEs appear to have established specific information programs for schools. These tend to concentrate on the local or principal "catchment" area, though some have a state-wide coverage. They typically include newsletters, open and information days, campus visits by school groups, and visits by TAFE staff to senior school classes. Some institutes commit substantial resources and are highly imaginative in endeavouring to ensure that careers and Year 12 teachers have up-to-date and good quality information available to them for their work with their students. In Victoria the relatively recent inclusion of information on TAFE courses in the tertiary admissions (VTAC) guide is seen by all parties as a major advance.

The work of many institutes to develop a mutual identification with their local regions has also drawn attention to the special facilities and services which are available to support students.

TAFE staff report a perception that these efforts bear fruit - that once careers teachers are informed and supported they often become very positive about VET possibilities for their students, even in schools which have had little history of interest in TAFE-based VET. Teachers are certainly appreciative of the support which they see as having improved considerably in recent years and as complementing their own

regional networks. They see variations between institutes, and experience some frustrations, but generally see the "pace-setter" institutes as offering appropriate services which the other institutes should imitate.

For many careers and Year 12 teachers their principal concern is that organisational rigidities in their schools caused by staffing and workload pressures may not permit them to avail themselves of all the services offered by the TAFE institutes or to disseminate the information they have for students as effectively as they would wish. Teachers in schools outside the metropolitan and provincial city areas face particular problems since transport costs limit the scope for them and their students to gather information through face-to-face contact.

5. ***Improved levels of experience of and information on VET programs, in interaction with social and economic factors, is resulting in changes in young people's attitudes and behaviour in relation to VET.***

There is confidence that the general community understanding of what TAFEs are like and what they offer has significantly improved in recent years. There is awareness that, aside from direct experience of and information about VET programs, a most powerful factor for young people in considering the VET/TAFE option is positive feedback about a TAFE experience through family and community contacts. It is felt that more of this positive hearsay information now permeates communities and that this is contributing to the "slow turnaround" in the willingness of young people to consider VET options.

It is suggested that growing community understanding of contemporary labour market circumstances is another contributing factor. Increasingly people accept that economic restructuring has removed many types of jobs and the likelihood of movement from school into full-time permanent employment; that entrants to the workforce face severe early difficulties and a probability of multiple changes in employment and/or career. Notions such as the maximising of options, of opening multiple pathway possibilities, and of turning any opportunities to advantage are now more readily accepted.

In this context careers teachers report that, though overwhelmingly university entrance remains the preferred option for school leavers, more students and parents are paying attention to information on TAFE course options and students are giving greater consideration to their post-school choices than was the case even a few years ago. Teachers say that many students are attracted by the practical approach in VET and its apparent capacity to serve as a stepping stone to work or further study. They observe that the willingness to consider TAFE courses increases as students move from Year 9 through to Year 12.

There is consensus that progress has been made towards the general aim for students to approach decisions about post-school pathways with access to good quality information which is appropriate to their interests, capabilities and needs, and to make choices which are realistic and strategically sensible. The two phase approach where students only consider VET options if they are unsuccessful in achieving university entrance can too easily lead to "square peg in round hole" outcomes. There is evidence of declining use of this approach.

6. ***Based on feedback from past and present students TAFE staff identify a range of features which they believe are well regarded by students.***

Many of the features identified in this context match the advice received directly from students in the current study. Careers teachers report that some of these characteristics are increasingly understood and appreciated by senior school students.

Both TAFE and school personnel are inclined to the view that more needs to be done to promote these perceived characteristics of VET study:

- the local, regional identity of many TAFE institutes, their accessibility (often with good public transport services), and (in many instances) their modern facilities;
- experiential learning programs with continuous assessment and feedback and a confidence building sense of progress; (some students contrast the "hands-on" approach and focus on learning with their Year 12 studies where they see the emphasis as having been on assessment);
- capacity to meet student expectations - of those wanting a specific, job related program, and those wanting a "staging-post" program until further directions have clarified;
- flexibility of course arrangements - cross-crediting with other VET providers; recognition of prior learning (RPL) and fast-tracking; alternative study modes to accommodate changing personal circumstances;
- staff responsiveness to student need and (in many instances) small classes and good quality study support services;
- staff members' own industrial experience and/or knowledge; close links between courses and industry and industry recognition of courses;
- good reputations which courses have with industry and employers;
- the capacity to exit from courses into jobs (including jobs with good prospects and incomes) or to articulate with credit into further TAFE or university courses.

7. ***Circumstances or developments which can impede the trend for young people to give increasing consideration to VET programs have been identified.***

Looking at the TAFE sector as a whole it is likely that the identification of these characteristics relates to aspiration as well as to practice. Certainly reservations have been expressed in relation to several of the points. For example, whilst there is strong formal commitment to the RPL principle, it seems likely that its application is better developed in some institutes and programs than others. Similarly, whilst the incremental mastery approach to learning of competency based training (CBT) has been adopted, there is concern that it is often applied in a relatively sterile way and that learning quality can be lost because of an excessive emphasis on utilitarian outcomes, reductionism and fast-tracking.

Responsibility for delivery of program flexibility and responsiveness to student need is largely borne by staff at the program coordination level and efforts at that level are liable to be rendered more difficult because of institutional arrangements and procedures.

There is also widespread disappointment with the arrangements for articulation from TAFE into university courses, the impression being that fine intentions expressed in university policies too rarely converts into actual practice. The experience of providers is that many transfers have to be negotiated on a time consuming case-by-case basis. The most effective programmatic arrangements appear to be made for emerging disciplines such as information technology and with the newer universities.

If students are to increasingly experience realisation of the promise held out by the TAFE institutes (and the universities) in their image and projection of themselves in the above respects, continuing work needs to be done to narrow gaps between principle and application and to eliminate inconsistent practices.

For example, the movement of recent times towards a comprehensive secondary school curriculum inclusive of VET options and towards coordinated post-school VET

provisions based on national standards and accredited programs has been consistent with a vision of education and training which, if not "seamless" at least has reduced seams. In principle these approaches keep alternative pathways open and facilitate articulation through the various levels of learning. Any reversion towards separated so called academic and vocational curricula for schools, or to more workplace based and fragmented VET provisions would run counter to this principle.

In responding to encouragement to expand their involvement in VET, secondary schools may attempt this without making partnership links with TAFE institutes. Such a development would not only reduce school student access to TAFE expertise and facilities but could also make it more difficult to develop the articulation of school-to-TAFE programs.

Increasing demands on TAFE institutes have the potential to reduce their capacity to provide quality VET. The institutes are being required to cater for the needs of student populations with increasingly diverse aspirations, attitudes and levels of learning and confidence. They have to keep pace with the industries they serve and to anticipate emerging labour market requirements. There is an increasing reliance on, on the one hand, a contracting and aging full-time workforce and, on the other hand casualised staff with limited training. There is some evidence that the closure or contraction of community advisory services provided by state and local government is throwing additional burdens on the services provided by the TAFE institutes.

Community promotion and advocacy of VET has been a responsibility carried by the TAFE institutes yet they are at the same time in competition with each other. Industry and employer organisations have traditionally connected to the formal education system through their close links with the TAFE institutes. The development of more industry-based VET could occur in ways which weaken these links. and take industry away from the educational institutions. A case can be made for industry as a key stakeholder in VET to strengthen its partnership with government and the TAFE institutes and to work on the general community advocacy front and in providing information for families and students through schools. The institutes could then concentrate more of their promotional energies on their own programs and principal catchment areas.

There is a particular need for direct and expanded industry involvement in the efforts of TAFE institutes and careers teachers to promote the participation of females in non-traditional occupations and industries. Girls in their final school years need access to first-hand, industry derived case study and other material which helps them to imagine themselves in non-traditional work, as well as to information on appropriate training pathways and income and career prospects.

Just as traditional patterns create barriers to girls' entry to certain VET programs and so reduce the talent available to some industries, so do living away from home costs prevent some rural families from supporting their school-leaver children through preferred VET programs. Again, the industry/government/TAFE partnership should give consideration to how best to respond to this need. Many metropolitan TAFE institutes have set up accommodation referral and homestay programs to assist students from rural areas.

Reference has already been made to the capacity of careers teachers to effectively disseminate information about VET to their students no matter how good the quality of this information may be. In most schools these teachers must ration the time they have for individual counselling. Many careers teachers have experienced reductions in time allowances for this aspect of their responsibilities. The Federal Government's plan to shift some of the Commonwealth Employment Service work with first-time job seekers to consortia of private agencies and careers teachers has significant implications for the role of careers teacher.

8. ***There is cautious confidence that there will be a continuing trend for VET programs to be given more general and serious consideration by young people.***

TAFE and school partnership programs of the dual recognition type are likely to be attractive to schools seeking to expand their involvement in VET. They facilitate a smooth transition into post-school VET programs.

Families and young people are tending to take a somewhat longer term view of the post-school period and to be strategic in aiming for employment opportunities. They increasingly see merit in more varied approaches to post-school education and training - deferments and breaks from study; combining work and study; TAFE course preferences to back up university preferences; TAFE courses to lead into degree courses; etc.

There is emerging evidence that some families are weighing up study cost factors more carefully - up-front TAFE fees and the possibility of more rapid access to good incomes against more substantial HECS obligations and possible delays in gaining entry to a chosen profession.

Likely improvements in TAFE to university articulation as experience is accumulated and government and industry expectations of university performance in this area is more firmly expressed.

Possible encouragement from government for increased participation in VET programs in response to persistent labour market problems and as part of a move to shift student load into training fields demanding lower levels of public expenditure.

The emergence of more informed managers in industry with a detailed knowledge and appreciation of the capabilities generated within particular TAFE courses and a willingness to be guided by this knowledge in recruiting staff.

## Conclusion

An informed assessment of both the strengths and weaknesses of current VET operations and their capacity to meet the needs of the student participants has certainly resulted from our consultations with VET providers. In large measure, their assessment reinforces most of the evidence uncovered in the first Phase of the Project both in the participant interviews and also the large questionnaire. Chart 8 provides the headings of the main issues and concerns raised in Phase 2.

Chart 8. Providers: Main Issues and Concerns

1. *School students in their final years are likely to be exposed to a bias against the VET/TAFE option present in the community generally, in their parents' attitudes and among their peers.*

2. *Developments in secondary schooling created an effective barrier to adequate information on the VET/TAFE option being available to school students in their final years.*

3. *Senior school students are now more likely to have direct experience of VET and related activities.*

4. *Good quality information relevant to the VET option is now more readily available to senior school students.*

5. *Improved levels of experience of and information on VET programs, in interaction with social and economic factors, is resulting in changes in young people's attitudes and behaviour in relation to VET.*

6. *Based on feedback from past and present students TAFE staff identify a range of features which they believe are well regarded by students.*

7. *Circumstances or developments which can impede the trend for young people to give increasing consideration to VET programs have been identified.*

8. *There is cautious confidence that there will be a continuing trend for VET programs to be given more general and serious consideration by young people.*

# 6. Barriers to Participation

The aim of this Project was 'to examine student aspirations, experience and outcomes in order to identify barriers to participation in and effective delivery of programs in Vocational Education and Training'. The preceding chapters of this report make it clear that from the students' perspectives their actual participation in various programs and the delivery of those has been effective and productive. This is a view that is confirmed by the judgments of the VET providers who were also consulted about the various programs. Despite this positive assessment, the students themselves, both within the interviews and in responses to the major questionnaire, have drawn attention to a number of 'barriers to participation in and effective delivery of programs'. This final chapter is concerned with this issue.

## Students from Rural Areas

There were 639 in the survey sample (63 per cent female) who were classified as 'rural', being from either a small or large country town, as were 25 of the interview group. The vast majority (87 per cent) of the rural respondents had undertaking further study after leaving high school but were less likely than the metropolitan to have done three or more years of study (65 as against 78 per cent).

Issues concerning the proximity and accessibility of suitable VET institutions have particular impact on these students, with consequent movement out of both the parental home and the local area becoming significant factors in their lives. Only 48 per cent of the rural respondents expected to be living in rural areas in five years time, and already many had left home for the city. Thus, whereas 86 per cent of the metropolitans had been mainly living with their parents since leaving high school and 76 per cent were still doing so in 1996, this was only the case for 48 per cent of rural respondents on first enrolling and for only 42 per cent by 1996. What is significant here in educational terms, however, is that as a result the rural youth were more likely to find that living away from the family home (39 versus 15 per cent) and away from their home town (31 versus 6 per cent) made their study very or a bit difficult.

Perhaps associated with this is the fact that more of the rural group (44 as against 27 per cent) had been living on unemployment benefits at some time since leaving school, and currently relied on full-time work (57 as against 46 per cent) rather than a study allowance (11 as against 17 per cent) as their main source of income. The following Table presents the main contrasts.

**Table 36. Transition Factors for Rural Respondents**

| *transition factor* | *1991 rural home (%)* | *1991 urban home (%)* |
|---|---|---|
| three or more years of post-school study | 65 | 78 |
| still living in parental home in 1996 | 42 | 76 |
| difficulties due to being away from home | 39 | 15 |
| has depended on unemployment benefits | 44 | 27 |
| currently dependent on full-time work | 57 | 46 |

The difficulties associated with moving elsewhere for tertiary studies were commented on in the interviews. A major reason for those who moved from the country into the city was the lack of options in rural areas: *"If you really want to do tertiary study the only real options are in Melbourne"*. For those people who wanted to pursue a specific career, the smaller choices in courses and subjects at a rural college usually required them to move to Melbourne. One person who did not even want to move *had* to go to the city, and she tried to delay it until she felt "able to cope" with city-life.

As we pointed out in our section on 'Regional Issues' in Chapter 3, for those who did move into Melbourne, there were several problems. Some had *"huge difficulty in getting housing"*, others were not happy with their public transport and the amount of time to get to school. Several have found it harder to survive financially in the city - usually because of their ineligibility for Austudy - one person *"finding it difficult to survive let alone study"*. Feelings of isolation were also experienced by country students in a new environment.

It is clear from this study that for rural youth the choice of an educational pathway beyond high-school has an impact on family relationships and can carry extra financial and personal burdens that impact in turn on their studies. The movement out of the parental home and the local area can also involve a succession of moves within or between different colleges or universities. Here again, there are differences between rural and urban respondents in terms of educational transitions. Thus, while fewer of the rural students are likely to have undertaken university studies (62 per cent compared with 76 per cent), this was partly because they were more likely to have considered other options such as a TAFE college (17 as against 9 per cent) or apprenticeships (8 as against 3 per cent). They were also more likely to have attended a TAFE college (36 versus 22 per cent) and to have had experience of both a college and a university (20 versus 17 per cent). At least one-fifth of both the rural and urban respondents had changed courses at some stage, but the proportion of the rural group which eventually discontinued was considerably higher (20 as compared with 13 per cent). The following Table presents some of these contrasts.

**Table 37. Rural Student Educational Options**

| *educational options* | *rural (%)* | *urban (%)* |
|---|---|---|
| eventually attended university | 62 | 76 |
| intended going to vocational college | 17 | 9 |
| intended doing apprenticeship | 8 | 3 |
| attended vocational college | 36 | 22 |
| attended both college and university | 20 | 17 |
| changed institutions | 18 | 22 |
| changed courses | 22 | 26 |
| discontinued | 20 | 13 |

These variations between the urban and rural respondents raise questions about whether the different needs and experiences of the two groups are taken sufficiently into account in the provision of courses in major regional centres and student guidance and support services for country students in the metropolitan area. The VET pathway is at once more important but also more difficult for the rural entrants than for their city counterparts. They are more likely to have considered TAFE as an option, are also more likely to have attended TAFE, but in our sample a greater proportion of the rural group (20 as compared with 13 per cent) eventually failed to complete their course. This suggests scope for improvement in 'the effective delivery of programs' for students from rural areas.

## Public Perceptions

The most serious 'barrier to participation' identified by the respondents in this study is clearly the undervaluing of the VET pathway within public policy and attitudes as well as in school settings.

In the context of the early nineties there was an overwhelming pre-occupation within schools and the wider community with the pathways from school into a university of some kind. This pre-occupation was not a matter of chance. As Henry (1992) has pointed out, it reflected the priority given by the Federal Government during the Dawkins years to the restructuring of higher education. Thus although TAFE would have been a more logical starting point for achieving the high participation targets the government sought it remains 'curious' that it was the university sector that was chosen for restructuring and expansion. It is not surprising therefore that in the minds of students, their teachers and their parents staying on to complete their final years of schooling was associated with the gaining of entry into a university. The VET alternatives were inevitably disregarded and undervalued. In 1992 Sweet demonstrated that 'between 1984 and 1990 the interest of 15- to 24-year olds in TAFE has fallen from 22 per cent to 12 per cent, while interest in university has risen from 19 per cent to 31 per cent' (Sweet, 1992, p. 37), and a later DEET study of NSW Year 10 - 12 students' found that four times as many aspired to university (64 per cent) as TAFE (15 percent) (DEET, 1993, p. 6).

This university pre-occupation within school settings was commented on particularly within the interviews conducted during this Project. The student comments on the issue are presented in Chapter 3 in the section on 'Changed Perceptions'. What is significant about their comments is the dramatic turnaround in their attitudes once they had moved beyond their school settings. Clearly in their final school years one of the major barriers to participation in vocational education and training was the prejudicial disregard of VET at the school level. Clearly too direct experience of VET produced an outcome of high regard.

In designing our interview schedule and survey questions, we sought to provide the respondents with ample opportunity for criticism of the VET option and allowed scope for those who had been successful in gaining their first preference for a university education to express their views also. The outcomes of this were incontrovertible - there was a dramatic shift of opinion and change of emphasis once the realities of post-school education and training programs were engaged. In fact, the VET pathway not only emerges as one held in high regard but also one that for many participants was even assessed as 'the better option'.

This issue was one that was highlighted also in our consultations with VET providers. While they drew attention to improvements in the dissemination of knowledge about the 'non-university' options and some shift in public perceptions, they still spoke in terms of a 'slow turnaround'. It is to be hoped that the evidence presented in this Report will serve to speed up that process.

## Final Comment

We have deliberately restricted ourselves in this final chapter to two matters that can be clearly identified as definite barriers affecting the VET participants. There are of course other issues which point to limitations and concerns of a negative kind which, while they may not be defined as 'barriers', nevertheless do affect both access to and delivery of VET options. Those issues have been discussed in chapter 3 ('Assessment of VET Options') and chapter 5 ( item 7 of 'Specific Issues'), and also demand attention if better outcomes for VET participants are to be achieved. Overall, however, the lasting impression formed at the end of our consultations with both the participants and the providers is one of a VET sector that, as the vast majority of the questionnaire respondents affirmed, 'should be more highly regarded' and is 'worth recommending to others'.

# References


Abbott-Chapman, J., Hughes, P., and Wyld, C. (1991). *Improving Access Of Disadvantaged Youth To Higher Education*. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Australian Education Council (AEC) (1992). *Listening To Girls*. Ashenden and Associates.

Australian National Opinion Polls (ANOP) (1988). *A Survey of Community Attitudes to Commonwealth Employment, Education and Training Policies and Programs*. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Baker, M. and Wooden, M. (1992). Training in the Australian Labour Market: Evidence from the *How Workers Get Their Training Survey* in *Australian Bulletin of Labour* vol 18 no 1.

Carmichael, L. (Chair) (1992). *The Australian Vocational Certificate Training System* Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Commonwealth of Australia (1994) *Working Nation: Policies and Programs* AGPS, Canberra.

Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission (CTEC) (1982). *Learning and Earning, vol. 2*. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Davis D. (1988). *School to Work: The HEW Factor*. Melbourne: Nelson.

Department of Employment Education and Training (DEET) (1989). *Selected TAFE Statistics*. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Department of Employment Education and Training (DEET) (1993). *NSW Year 10 - 12 Students' Attitudes to Post-compulsory Education and Training*. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Department of Employment Education and Training (DEET) (1994). *Young People's Attitudes to Post-compulsory Education and Training*. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Dwyer, P. (1993). *Preparing Students For Future Pathways*. Melbourne: Youth Research Centre, University of Melbourne.

Finn, B. (Chairperson, Australian Education Council Review Committee) (1991). *Young People's Participation In Post-Compulsory Education And Training* Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Henry, M. (1992) Higher education for all? Tensions and contradictions in post-compulsory and higher education policy in Australia, *Journal of Education Policy*, vol 7, no 4, pp. 399-413.

Holden, E. (1992). *Getting A Life: Pathways And Early School Leavers.* Working Paper No 9. Melbourne, Youth Research Centre: University of Melbourne.

Johnston, S. (1990). *Retention Rates: More Than Just Counting Heads.* Queensland: Department of Education.

Leo, T. (1989). The Changing Face of TAFE in Australia in Meek, V. L. and Harrold, R. (eds) *TAFE and the Reconstruction of Higher Education.* Armidale: Department of Continuing Education, University of New England.

# Youth Research Centre

The Youth Research Centre is located within the Faculty of Education at The University of Melbourne. It was established in 1988 in response to a recognised need by the youth affairs sector for relevant and up to date research on the issues facing young people today.

The aims of the YRC are to:

- conduct relevant, coherent and reliable research on young people in Australia, with a state, national and international focus;
- assist with the development of policy and the implementation of initiatives based on research findings;
- develop strong links with the youth affairs sector, with particular attention to helping to identify and address the sector's research needs;
- facilitate communication between educators, researchers, policy makers and youth workers;
- support the research activities of university staff and post-graduate students who have a specific interest in youth affairs; and,
- enhance the professional development of staff and students by assisting them to be informed about the broader context of young people's lives.

## Youth Research Centre Activities

The YRC has particular expertise in research on education, transition pathways, social justice, gender equity and employment issues as they affect young people.

The main YRC activities are:

- undertaking research and publishing the outcomes in a manner accessible to policy makers and the youth sector;
- providing information and policy advice to governments and other organisations;
- assisting and encouraging individuals or groups who work with young people.

YRC activities involve:

- undertaking small projects for groups lacking the capacity or opportunity to do so themselves;
- providing a base for post-graduate students wishing to undertake Masters or PhD research on topics related to young people and the youth sector;
- enabling academics to participate in established YRC projects, and/or undertake their own research on youth related issues;
- maintaining a youth sector resource library;
- publishing series of Working Papers and Research Reports;
- conducting public seminars and conferences on a variety of issues relevant to those working in the youth sector.



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ISBN 0 7325 1532 7